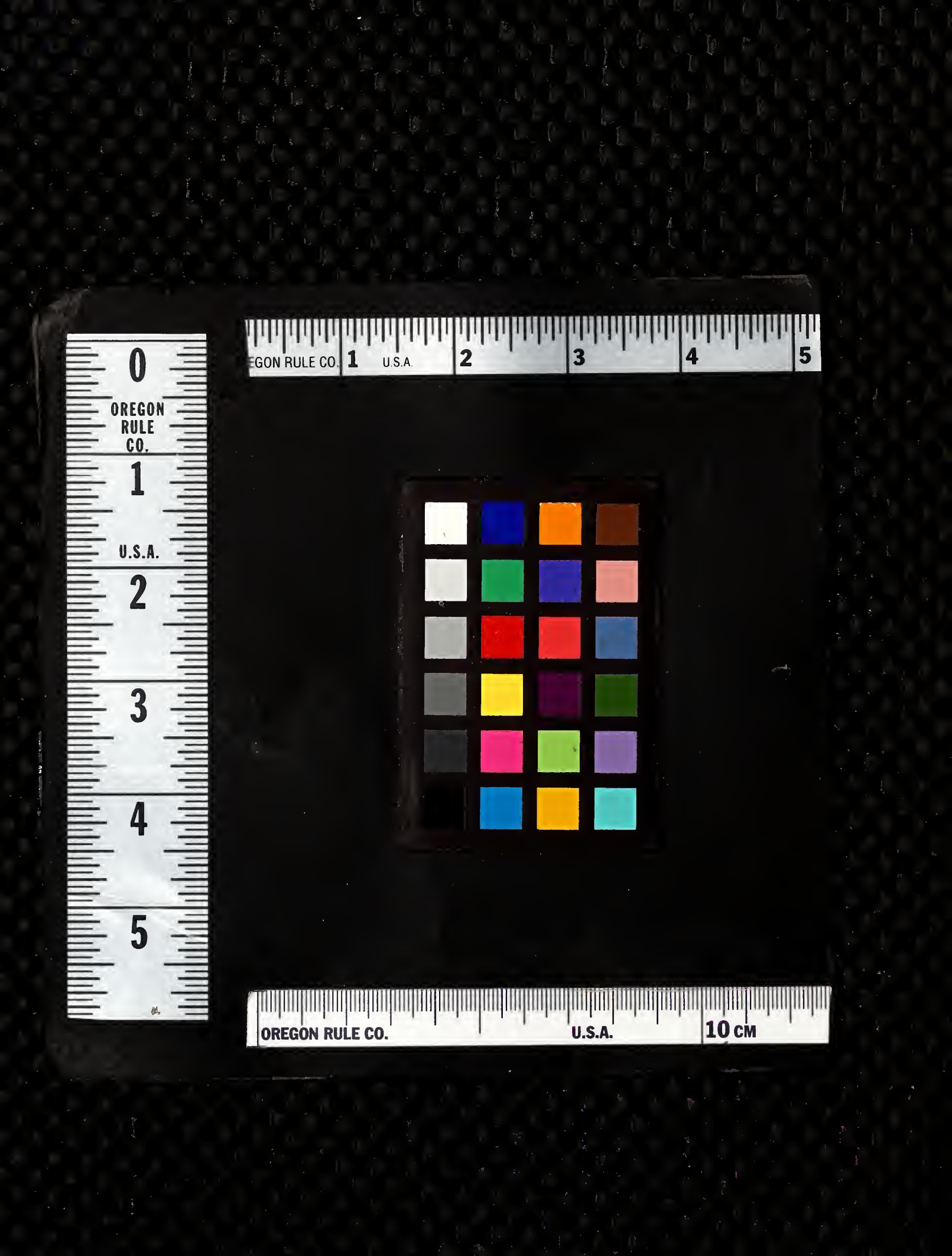
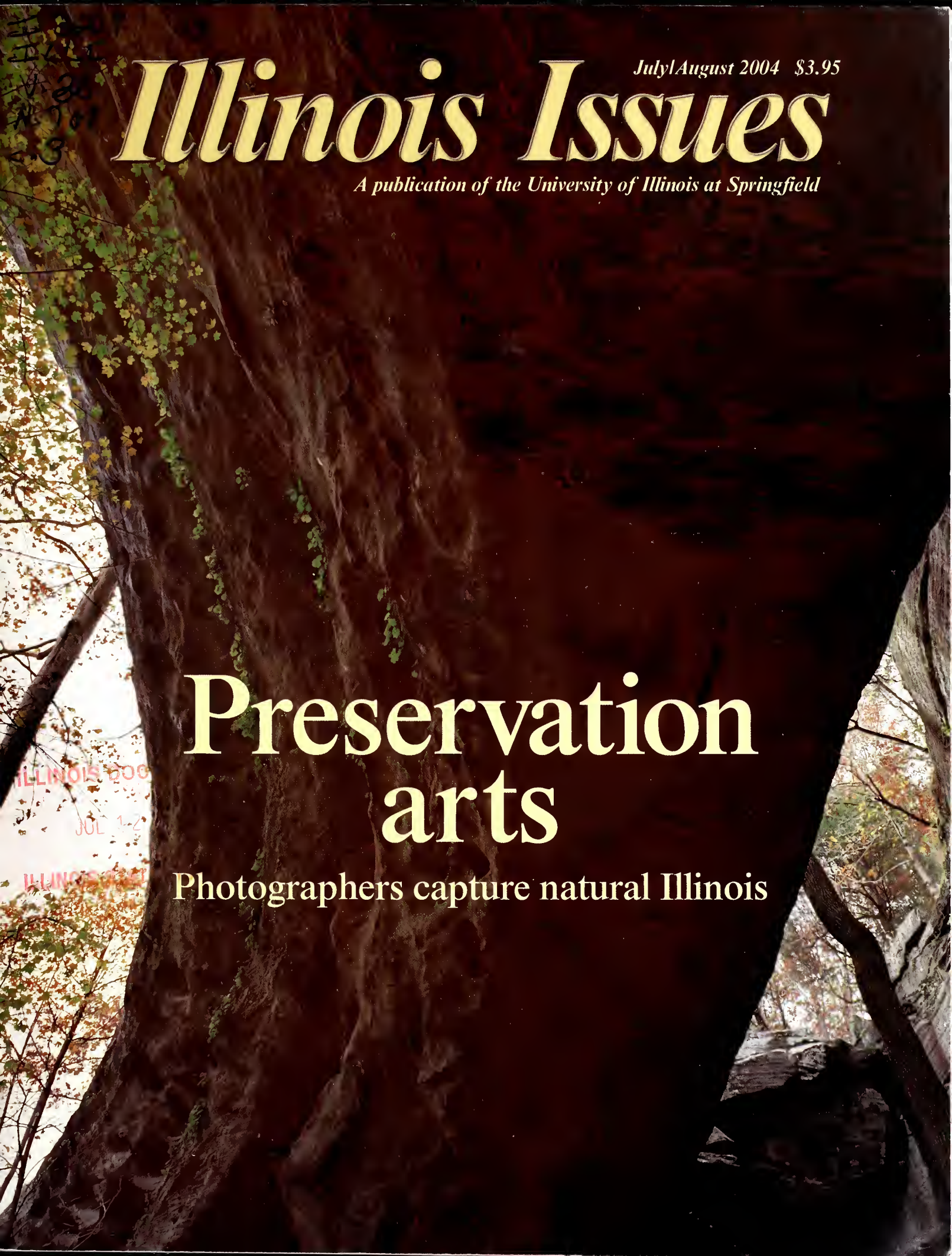

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Is it already too late for a new environmental revolution?

by Peggy Boyer Long

Forty-two years ago, a government biologist and science editor helped launch an environmental revolution. In *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson untangled scientific jargon and unmasked industry spin to catalog the ways toxic chemicals commonly used in insecticides are reconfiguring cellular processes in plants and animals, altering the soil, the water and the air, and changing the relationship of humans to the Earth itself.

She challenged the public and the government, in essayist Linda Lear's words, "to regulate our appetites — a truly revolutionary stance — for our self-preservation."

Carson would not know the extent to which her challenge succeeded in raising public consciousness and rousing government action. And she could not know that over the next four decades the stakes would go higher and the challenges would get steeper. *Silent Spring* was published in 1962. Carson died of breast cancer 18 months later.

An aquatic biologist for the federal Bureau of Fisheries, later to become the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Carson became editor of the agency's publications. She already had published popular books on oceanography for the general reader, including the best-seller *The Edge of the Sea*, before she began taking notice of environmental damage caused by widespread aerial spraying of DDT and other pesticides.

> ***"To a large extent, the physical form and the habits of the earth's vegetation and its animal life have been molded by the environment. Considering the whole span of earthly time, the opposite effect, in which life actually modifies its surroundings, has been relatively slight. Only within the moment of time represented by the present century has one species — man — acquired significant power to alter the nature of his world."***
>
> **Rachel Carson**
> ***Silent Spring*, 1962**

"There was a strange stillness," Carson wrote in "A Fable for Tomorrow," the opening chapter of *Silent Spring*. "The birds, for example — where had they gone? Many people spoke of them, puzzled and disturbed. The feeding stations in the backyards were deserted. The few birds seen anywhere were moribund; they trembled violently and could not fly. It was a spring without voices. On the mornings that had once throbbed with the dawn chorus of robins, catbirds, doves, jays, wrens, and scores of other bird voices there was now no sound; only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh."

The birds, Carson argued — and the fish and the animals — are harbingers. She went on to link pesticide exposure to human cancer and genetic deterioration. "It is ironic," she wrote, "to think that man might determine his own future by something so seemingly trivial as the choice of an insect spray."

Much has happened since the publication of *Silent Spring*. A wider environmental movement was born, which organized the first nationwide Earth Day in 1970. The Environmental Protection Agency was created. Use of DDT was banned in the United States. The federal government approved laws governing protection of water, air, land and endangered species.

James Gustave Speth was inspired by this environmental action, much of it in the 1970s, and by Rachel Carson.

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"But," he writes in *Red Sky at Morning*, "we should also acknowledge that the cause to which she summoned us is still at best half-won."

Speth's research, published this year, is a significant extension of Carson's premise. His reference pertains to the continued worldwide use of chemical pesticides. But his book catalogs a wider array of ways in which humans are altering their world, and for the worse.

He posits his own challenge, too: Protection of the world's ecology is no longer a local issue only; it must go global. Human activity has begun to adversely affect the polar ice caps, the oceans and world climates. And such changes are happening at a more rapid pace than was generally imagined in Carson's time.

"The destruction of the environment as a by-product of human enterprise is not new, but for most of our history it remained a localized and limited problem. The many forms of damage to the earth and its creatures increased in severity and scope during the Industrial Revolution," he writes. "Yet it was not until just after World War II that the fast-forward button was pushed down and held."

We are, he argues, sailing into disastrous waters, the storm is gathering — hence the sailors' warning in the title. The question he asks is, can this fragile ship be saved? Or will we change forever the world as we know it?

Speth is dean of the School of Forestry & Environmental Studies at Yale University. He served as an adviser on environmental issues for Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, and as chief executive officer of the United Nations Development Programme. And he was awarded the Blue Planet Prize for bringing global warming to wide attention.

In *Red Sky at Morning*, Speth documents the loss of forests, wetlands and species under human stewardship, but he calls our impact on the global climate machine the most risky "commandeering of natural systems."

"The best current estimate is that, unless there is a major world correction, climate change projected for late this century will make it impossible for about half the American land to sustain the types of plants and animals now on that land."

Concentrations of carbon dioxide play a critical role in trapping heat in the earth's atmosphere. And this increase in so-called greenhouse gases corresponds to increasing global use of fossil fuels — the oil, natural gas and coal used to run automobiles, light homes and power factories.

Most scientists don't dispute this; many politicians do.

Speth details efforts at international solutions to environmental problems — success in shrinking the atmospheric ozone hole after the Montreal agreement, the U.S. hangup over carbon dioxide reductions in the Kyoto agreement. Overall, he believes international governments are inadequate for the rapid response now required.

He looks, instead, to a new generation of environmental activists to effect change. He worries, though, that the dangers are more abstract and diffuse than in Carson's time, making it more difficult to move the public — and government.

Still, he has plenty of suggestions. At the least, global warming should become part of this nation's policy, including fuel efficiency and the use of alternative forms of energy.

We need an environmental revolution for the 21st century, he writes. "To despair when confronted with the challenges we have created would only assure a human and natural calamity we still have the power to avoid." ❑

Peggy Boyer Long can be reached at peggyboy@aol.com.

Bookshelf

Silent Spring by Rachel Carson, 40th Anniversary Edition, with essays by Edward O. Wilson and Linda Lear, Mariner Books, 2002.
Red Sky at Morning: America and the Crisis of the Global Environment by James Gustave Speth, Yale University Press, 2004.

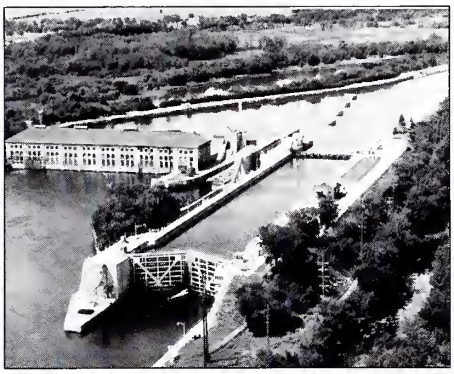
Illinois Issues

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Spring rains that replenish most lakes have a different effect in Hartford

by Pat Guinane

Like the central Illinois towns of Shelbyville, Decatur and Springfield, the Metro East village of Hartford is home to a man-made lake. With estimates as large as 4 million gallons, the Hartford lake would be roughly one-fourth as large as the reservoir that provides recreation and drinking water to the state capital. But, unlike Lake Springfield, the Hartford lake is underground — and made of gasoline, not water.

The heavy spring rains that replenish most lakes have a different effect in Hartford. They stir the underground water table and the accompanying layer of spilled petroleum products that rests above, sending noxious vapors up into basements and crawl spaces.

Since the late 1960s, the phenomenon has been blamed for about a dozen house fires, many more home evacuations and countless cases of headaches, rashes and other minor health problems. But after several unsuccessful attempts, it appears state and federal officials are committed to cleaning the lake of hydrocarbons.

Hartford, a village of 1,500, was home to oil refineries long before it came to host a lake of gas. The first refinery opened in 1908. And at one time, as many as three gasoline-producing plants provided jobs to the Madison County community. Two

With estimates as large as 4 million gallons, the Hartford lake would be roughly one-fourth as large as the reservoir that provides recreation and drinking water to the state capital.

of the refineries have been closed for more than a decade. The third has changed ownership. But when the old oil companies left town, they left behind a collection of spilled petroleum products that rests under most of north Hartford.

"I remember news stories where people were actually able to light and set fire to their dirt, that's how bad this was," says William Mudge. Last summer, Mudge, the Madison County state's attorney, joined Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan in a lawsuit against two of the oil companies that once operated in Hartford.

The suit certainly was not the first time the state stepped in. But past efforts failed to remedy the problem. The noxious vapors and the house fires subsided after the companies installed systems to extract some of the subterranean pollution. But a few years later, the problems flared up again.

Only now, with the help of the federal government, does it appear that Hartford residents might eventually live free of fumes. But, even while state and federal officials worked to clean up contamination in Hartford, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency issued a permit allowing a new company to reopen a portion of the refinery deemed responsible for much of the pollution.

ConocoPhillips owns the Wood River refinery in Roxana, the last of three refineries to operate in the Hartford area. In 2002, ConocoPhillips bought part of the Premcor refinery in Hartford. This April, with a problem at the Wood River site threatening to lower the company's gasoline output, ConocoPhillips sought permission to reopen part of the Premcor site and connect the facilities. At the time, the state's gasoline pump prices were at their highest since September 2001. So, with no mention of Hartford's environmental plight, Gov. Rod Blagojevich approved a temporary permit, capitalizing on a public relations opportunity.

"The bottom line is that gasoline shortages mean increased gasoline prices," Gov. Rod Blagojevich said at the time. "We recognize the serious

impact ConocoPhillips' operating problems could have on gasoline consumers in some of our state's highest-priced gasoline markets."

Despite the hyperbole, Blagojevich's action was short-lived and did little to stem higher pump prices. The Illinois EPA issued its own superseding final permit a week later. And as the plant resumed production, gas prices soared in the ensuing weeks, hitting a state average of $2.07 in mid-May or 25 cents higher than when Blagojevich ordered the temporary permit.

But why would the state allow a refinery largely responsible for a lake of gasoline to reopen?

"The contamination occurred, of course, under Premcor ownership and not ConocoPhillips. We are treating those as separate issues," says Kim Kuntzman, spokeswoman for the Illinois EPA Bureau of Air. In the state's opinion, responsibility for the existing ground pollution did not transfer along with refinery ownership.

The permit was for the air pollution that would accompany reopening the facility. Officials in the Illinois EPA Bureau of Land are the ones who deal with the pollution underneath Hartford. But it's easy to understand how residents could see the two as intertwined. Back in March, before Blagojevich intervened, the Illinois EPA held a public hearing on the air permit. The meeting had to be moved to the local grade school after gas vapors — a land issue — made the Hartford Recreation Center unsafe.

Over the past 40 years, those same fumes have made homes in Hartford uninhabitable from time to time. Residents also claim they have endured more lasting negative effects on their health and property values. At least two citizen lawsuits have been filed against Premcor and several other companies that own or have owned refineries or underground pipelines in the area.

While those citizens seek their own legal redress, the state has handed the reins to the U.S. EPA, which has begun flexing its enforcement muscle. Although considered a last resort, the federal agency has access to an oil pollution fund generally only tapped for U.S. Coast Guard cleanups. If polluters can't be prodded into action on their own, the U.S. EPA can begin cleanup itself and then send the offenders a bill. It's similar to the way in which the federal government uses Superfund to remediate hazardous waste sites.

"Things just tend to move along more quickly when there are legally required deadlines," says Maggie Carson, spokeswoman for the Illinois EPA's Bureau of Land.

In March, Premcor, Atlantic Richfield Co. and Shell Oil Products US signed a U.S. EPA agreement to address the vapor problems and design a permanent cleanup plan for the pool of petroleum products under Hartford.

"To be honest, it might take 20 or 30 years to pump this stuff out," says Mike Joyce, spokesman for the U.S. EPA in Chicago. "We wish it was in a pool or a cavern or something, but it's not. It's sort of like in the sandy material. It's like trying to pump stuff out of a sponge almost. So it's not as easy as it sounds and it takes a long time."

In 1978, after 76 gas odor complaints and five separate vapor-fed fires, Clark Oil — then the owner of a Hartford refinery and underground pipelines — installed wells to pump out the contamination under Hartford.

The next spate of complaints surfaced in 1990, when an exceedingly wet spring preceded by two dry years brought strong odors and several fires. By then, the Clark wells had recovered nearly 1.2 million gallons of petroleum remnants from underneath Hartford.

But an extensive Illinois EPA report that year concluded that 900,000 to 3.8 million gallons remained. After that, Clark Oil installed a vapor recovery system connected to a dozen boreholes across north Hartford in the hopes of catching the vapors before they entered homes.

It was another decade before the vapors again captured state attention. In 2002, after complaints of nausea and chronic headaches, the Illinois EPA and the state Department of Public Health began compiling air quality samples.

The following summer the Illinois attorney general's office and then the U.S. EPA got involved. Under the federal agreement, Premcor, Shell and Atlantic Richfield are currently purchasing the parts to install a new, more efficient vapor recovery system. They also agreed to purchase individual home recovery kits — essentially a fan-drawn, basement-to-roof piping system — for any north Hartford resident who wants one. And the companies will begin reimbursing the town's volunteer fire department for vapor-related calls.

Joyce, the U.S. EPA spokesman for the project, says those considerations were the result of recent public hearings. And he hopes another such "open house" scheduled for July 8 will continue to assuage community concerns. The trio of oil companies currently is conducting an extensive study of the underground contamination, the results of which are expected this fall. They then have until late December to present a plan to remove the contamination.

That schedule would seem to ease at last some concerns in Hartford. But the community has lived with the effects of the underground contamination for four decades. And what seemed like solutions in 1978 and again in 1990 were simply not sufficient. That makes it easy to understand why citizens, and even local officials, have guarded optimism. So says Mara McGinnis, community relations coordinator for the Illinois EPA.

"Their response has been measured. Let's put it that way. They recognize that, to this point, we've gotten a lot further than anyone's gotten in the past and they are cautiously optimistic, I guess, about us continuing at this kind of pace and this schedule," she says. "Nobody wants to come out of this with egg on their face, so they're being fairly cautious about what they say in the press, but they have expressed to us that they're really happy to see the progress."

Progress may not prompt immediate peace of mind. But, for the people of Hartford, drying up one of Illinois' most dubious man-made lakes would mean a lot fewer headaches. ❑

Pat Guinane can be reached at captiolbureau@aol.com.

BRIEFLY

Photographs by Jill Geiger, courtesy of the Environmental Law & Policy Center





AS THE TURBINE TURNS

Illinois' first wind farm harvests power

Illinois joined wind-energy producing states this spring with the dedication of its first wind farm southwest of DeKalb in Paw Paw.

The 63 turbines at Mendota Hills Wind Farm can generate 50.4 megawatts of energy, which is estimated to put out enough power for 15,000 homes over the course of a year. The Lee County farm, owned by Minnesota-based NAVITAS Energy, uses turbines built by the Spanish manufacturer Gamesa Energia, which invested $60 million in the project.

The plant makes Illinois one of 30 states with wind farms and brings it closer to fulfilling its potential among states that can generate energy from wind. The American Wind Energy Association ranks Illinois 16th in that capability.

Wind-generated energy is promoted by environmental advocacy groups because it doesn't produce smog or greenhouse gas emissions.

"Mendota Hills is up and running; it breaks the ice in Illinois," says Howard Learner, executive director of the Chicago-based Environmental Law & Policy Center. Another 10 wind farms are in development.

His group advocates legislation that would require Illinois electric utilities to get 2 percent to 3 percent of its energy supply from renewable sources, such as wind or solar power, by 2007. The goal is 5 percent by 2010 and 15 percent by 2020.

The ease of meeting such a goal will be affected by the outcome of legislation being debated in Congress in late June that would extend a tax credit that expired at the end of last year.

Maureen Foertsch McKinney

Photograph by John Marlin, courtesy of the Illinois Waste Management and Research Center



BROWNFIELD TO PARK

Peoria sends its mud to Chicago's lake shore

Mud-slinging is usually a pejorative term in politics, but this time it takes on bipartisan meaning. Lt. Gov. Patrick Quinn, a Democrat, and U.S. Rep. Ray LaHood, a Republican, have joined forces with the city of Chicago to use mud dredged from Peoria Lake to restore a South Side brownfield covered with steel slag.

"The Mud-to-Parks project is a great victory for the environment, both in central Illinois and Chicago," said Quinn, who chairs the Illinois River Coordinating Council, at the announcement of the project. LaHood, a Peoria native and representative for the area, added: "This 'silt send-off' launches a national model for creative solutions to the problem of sedimentation."

In April, 105,000 tons — of a potential 2 million tons — of sediment began the trip upriver by barge to create topsoil for a new park that will extend the Chicago park system a mile farther south. Seventeen acres of a 102-acre park on the site of the former U.S. Steel mill along Lake Michigan in South Chicago will be restored with downstate mud. "The Fon du Lac Park District of East Peoria is giving up its soil as sediment to be used as reclaimed topsoil by the Chicago Park District," says John Marlin, a senior scientist with the Waste Management and Research Center, a division of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and architect of the project. After the sludge dries and goes through a freeze-thaw cycle of Illinois winter, it will break up into a granular soil, rich in nutrients, ready for native grasses and other plants to transform the barren landscape to an inviting green.

Marlin conceived the plan and conducted a pilot project in 2002 that collected sediment near Peoria and barged it to a landfill in Chicago. Prairie grasses now grow in that reclaimed soil. Another experiment added the sediment to sandy soil in which corn was grown, increasing yields nearly four-fold. The sediment samples taken from that area have been "relatively clean" and free of contaminants, says Robert Darmody, a soil scientist at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. "Vast quantities of good Illinois topsoil end up in the river."

An artery in the state's water transportation system, the Illinois River must be dredged regularly to permit movement of barge traffic. Each year, 14 million tons of sediment go into the river basin, the equivalent of 17,808 truckloads daily. In Peoria Lake, a wide spot in the Illinois River, sedimentation is a special problem. The build-up reduces navigability and destroys habitat for fish and waterfowl.

The new park is part of a larger plan by the Chicago Park District to renovate almost 600 acres of lakeside property formerly owned by the steel plant, which closed in 1992.

The project is funded by a $2 million state grant and is a state/federal interagency effort, including several state departments, the city of Chicago and the Army Corps of Engineers.

Beverley Scobell

Wetlands debate drags into fall

Advocates of legislation to govern use of isolated wetlands in Illinois hope that after more than three years of deliberations a measure will be approved in the fall session.

The measure stalled in the log-jammed spring session; had it been called for a Senate vote at that point it likely would have failed, says Jonathan Goldman, executive director of the Illinois Environmental Council.

There have been no federal protections for isolated wetlands since 2001, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled they were outside the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Regulated wetlands are those, unlike isolated ones, that are connected to navigable waterways.

"Wetlands are important for a number of reasons," says Goldman. "They help to clean water, to filter out pollutants. They are wildlife habitats — particularly in Illinois for migratory birds, and they help to take up stormwater. One acre of wetland can absorb 1.5 million gallons of stormwater runoff."

Illinois has lost an estimated 90 percent of its wetlands. Of those remaining, 50 percent are isolated.

Under the proposed legislation, a permit from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources would be required to destroy an isolated wetland, with some exceptions. And a larger wetland area would have to be created to offset the loss.

A coalition of organizations that includes the Illinois State Chamber of Commerce, the Illinois Farm Bureau and the Home Builder Association of Illinois is pushing for an alternative form of the legislation, which would require a uniform state standard and would assign regulatory duties to the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency rather than the Department of Natural Resources, says Bart Bittner, assistant director of state legislation for the farm bureau. That organization also wants a permit fee set in the legislation.

"I've got no room to negotiate on the statewide standard," Bittner says.

Maureen Foertsch McKinney

Midewin opens trails for hikers and riders

The nation's first federally designated tallgrass prairie preserve, located in Illinois, recently opened its first trails for bicyclists, hikers and equestrians.

The Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie is a nearly 20,000-acre parcel located 40 miles southwest of Chicago at what was once the site of the former Joliet Army Ammunition Plant. The site is expected to one day resemble Illinois prior to settlement by European-Americans in the 1800s, when 21 million acres — nearly two-thirds of the state — was tallgrass prairie. Today, more than 99 percent of the state's landscape has ceded to urbanization or agriculture.

The Midewin prairie complex includes rare dolomite prairies, grasslands, savanna, wetlands, upland forests and streams, which when fully restored will provide habitats for 348 native plant species, 108 species of breeding birds — including the state's largest breeding population of endangered upland sandpipers — mammals, reptiles, amphibians and aquatic wildlife. Midewin now provides habitats for 16 endangered or threatened species.

The tract was transferred in 1997 from the U.S. Army to the U.S. Forest Service, which operates the site along with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

Midewin, the Potawatomi word for healing society, is open from an hour before sunrise until an hour after sunset. Access to the visitor center, which includes interpretative exhibits, is in Wilmington off Route 53. The phone number is (815) 423-6370.

The new Hoff Road Trailhead covers 10 miles, including shared-use trails for hikers, bicyclists and equestrians, and the Explosives Road Trailhead has two 1.5-mile hiking-only loops.

Visitors also can get to the prairie on foot from parking lots on River Road, east of Interstate 55.

Maureen Foertsch McKinney

Photographs by Bill Glass





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New exhibit portrays Illinois' natural history

The Illinois State Museum recently opened a renovated exhibit, *Changes*, which depicts historic shifts in Illinois' environment. The transformation of the Springfield museum's displays into an interactive exhibition using dioramas, object cases, hands-on elements, video and audio took three years.

One diorama, featuring such marine life as crinoids, brachiopods, corals, trilobites and sharks, depicts a period when shifting continents put Illinois near the equator. Another shows an area near Rock Island as an upland forest, filled with giant fernlike trees, huge dragonflies and amphibians. Interglacial Illinois covers the most recent 12,000 years of change.

A new Illinois River diorama depicts a backwater lake in 1673. Visitors can interact with the RiverWeb digital basin, developed with funding from the National Science Foundation. They can remove levees, observe floods, drive a towboat and search for fish. ❑

Legislature OKs energy-efficient building code

Illinois, the largest state lacking an energy-efficient building code, will lose that distinction if Gov. Rod Blagojevich signs legislation that sets such standards.

Sponsored by Democratic state Rep. Julie Hamos of Evanston, the legislation requires new construction or major rehab to follow standards set in the International Conservation Code. The measure applies to commercial and industrial buildings and residences higher than three stories. The Senate last year approved a measure that also covered single-family homes, but it failed to get through the House. "It's not perfect. It doesn't do everything, but it's a huge step forward in the right direction," says Howard Learner, executive director of the Chicago-based Environmental Law & Policy Center. "An energy-efficient building code is the best policy and practical step that a state like Illinois can take in terms of having to hold down energy costs in the future and to create environmental benefits for everyone."

The standards — already used in more than 40 municipalities throughout the state — apply to heating, cooling and ventilation systems, water heating, lighting and power. Learner's organization estimates that use of the standards for a 24,000-square-foot building would lower annual energy costs by 17 percent and reduce emissions of sulfur dioxide by as much as 317 tons a year. Emissions of nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide and particulate matter also would be reduced.

In addition to Illinois, 11 other states lack energy-efficient building standards for commercial construction.

Opponents include the Illinois Municipal League, which argues that a one-code-fits-all rule would overturn local control and fail to take into account the diversity of the state's communities. "We aren't opposed to energy efficiency," says league Executive Director Ken Alderson. "The problem we get into is Illinois is a very diverse state."

Maureen Foertsch McKinney

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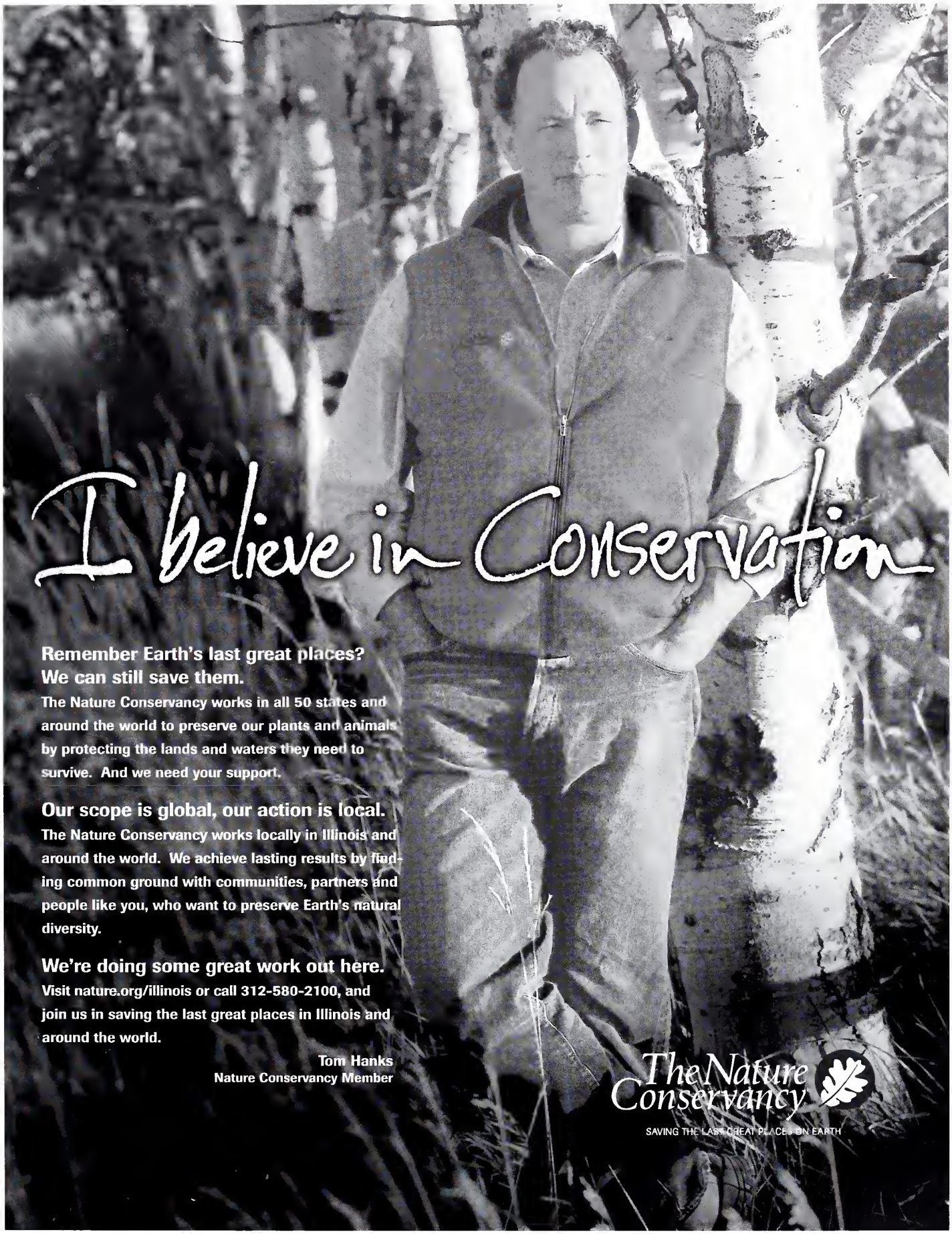
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OBIT



Ronald Reagan

The conservative icon, the only native Illinoisan to become president, died June 5. He was 93.

Reagan, who was plagued by Alzheimer's disease in his final years, energized the country with his man-of-the-people image and love-of-country message.

U.S. House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, whose district covers the region of Illinois where Reagan was born and raised, said it was there that Reagan "learned the common sense values and virtues that helped him reshape not only our nation, but also the world.

"When I first ran for public office in 1980, for the Illinois legislature, Ronald Reagan was running for president. Back then, people didn't have a lot of faith in America," Hastert said on the U.S. House floor. "What made him so special was his willingness to step forward and remind us what made America 'The Shining City on the Hill.' He restored our faith in America, and made us proud to be Americans again."

To conservatives, Reagan is the preeminent role model, the man whose efforts led to the end of the Cold War and deconstruction of the Berlin Wall, brought America out of financial despair and took it to a renewed sense of patriotism. To liberals, the 40th president, who cut spending for public services while boosting military expenditures, is the symbol of the age of declining governmental social supports.

Reagan also addressed the cuts he believed would be necessary to bring the country out of recession, which slowly began to occur in his administration.

In his first inaugural address, Reagan said, "If we look to the answer as to why, for so many years, we achieved so much, prospered as no other people on Earth, it was because here, in this land, we unleashed the energy and individual genius of man to a greater extent than has ever been done before. Freedom and the dignity of the individual have been more available and assured here than in any other place on Earth."

Thousands stood outdoors overnight waiting for a bus to transport them to the Reagan Presidential Library in California to view his casket before he was taken to Washington, D.C., where the public had an additional opportunity to pay their respects. June 11, the day of he was entombed near the Reagan library, was designated a day of national mourning.

Illinoisans paid their respects at Reagan's alma mater, Eureka College, which has the largest Reagan museum outside of his library, at his birthplace in Tampico and at his boyhood home in Dixon, where he saved lives as a guard at a local pool and served as high school student body president, starred in plays and competed on football, basketball and track teams.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich renamed a stretch of I-88 from Sterling to the Quad Cities the Ronald Reagan Memorial Highway. "Now, when people drive on I-88, they'll remember Ronald Reagan and everything he did for our country," Blagojevich stated in a printed release. "They'll remember his strength and convictions. They'll remember the way he restored our belief in the American dream."

The interstate passes Dixon, where Reagan lived from adolescence until age 21. He went on to a successful acting career during which he served as president of the Screen Actors Guild, making him the only president who had headed a union. In 1948, he supported Harry Truman for president, then backed Dwight Eisenhower, revealing his shifting party loyalty. He supported Nixon in 1960, formally switching to the Republican Party in 1962.

He was elected governor of California in 1966 and was sworn in for the first of two terms as president in 1981. He won a landslide victory over incumbent Jimmy Carter with the platform, "a new consensus with all those across the land who share a community of values embodied in these words: family, work, neighborhood, peace, and freedom." ❑

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Agroterrorism

Illinois officials aim to make the state's agriculture industry less vulnerable to attack

by Beverley Scobell

Photograph courtesy of Organic Valley Family of Farms



Much is at stake in the threat of agroterrorism. Illinois — with 1.4 million cows, more than 4 million hogs, 114,000 dairy cattle and 68,000 sheep and goats — has a $1.6 billion livestock industry.

The threat is real. The potential targets are virtually unprotected. The weapon is low-tech and easily obtained.

Government officials in charge of food safety are hesitant even to talk about agroterrorism, a word that's entered the nation's lexicon only recently and one that represents a potential economic catastrophe for Illinois and other food-producing states. "The fact is, agroterrorism is a very real threat," says U.S. Sen. Richard Durbin, "and if we're talking about contamination of our food supply, which is the worst possible threat, then we are, at the least, considering the disruption of the agricultural economy."

An intentional attack on our food system, whether foreign or domestic, could cause human deaths, but most diseases that attack agricultural plants and animals aren't directly harmful to people. That's one reason why the potential is alarming: No terrorist would have to become a martyr, just a little knowledgeable.

That vulnerability, along with others in the nation's food system, is cited in a 2004 report, *Hitting America's Soft Underbelly: The Potential Threat of Deliberate Biological Attacks Against the U.S. Agricultural and Food Industry*, prepared for the Department of Defense by the Rand Corp., a nonprofit research

organization based in Santa Monica, Calif. Author Peter Chalk writes that the United States "ignores the continuing vulnerability of the agricultural sector at its own peril."

In Illinois, the summer fair season offers a "grand opportunity" for a person bent on doing harm. Someone could "very easily produce a great amount of havoc," says Dr. Gavin Meerdink, head of the toxicology lab at the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine. "You could walk in, sprinkle a little virus out of a tube here and there, walk out and never be caught." Then fairgoers would head home, he says, carrying a disease that could take 48 to 72 hours to incubate and show symptoms. In that time, animals could be miles away.

Agroterrorism's greatest impact would likely be economic. Illinois has 1.4 million cows, more than 4 million hogs, 114,000 dairy cattle and 68,000 sheep and goats. The state generates nearly $7.5 billion annually in farm income, with the livestock industry generating $1.6 billion in cash receipts.

State and federal agriculture officials say a serious threat, whether by accident or design, is soybean rust, a naturally occurring disease found in other parts of the world. North American soybeans have no resistance, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture says in a January 2004 report that it's only a matter of time before it crosses the nation's borders.

Soybean rust could be used by terrorists to disrupt the economy if it were introduced before seed companies can develop a resistant strain. It spreads quickly in the wind and could be made into a low-tech biological weapon by simply rubbing the fungus on clothes and walking through unguarded fields.

In 2002, the latest figures available, soybeans accounted for $2.3 billion, or 30 percent, of the state's cash receipts for commodities. Yet half of the soybean crop could be lost if the disease were introduced into Illinois farm fields, says Jeff Squibb, spokesman for the Illinois Department of Agriculture. And if products made from soybeans at food processing plants such as Archer Daniels Midland in Decatur are included, the potential economic damage multiplies exponentially.

Awareness of the vulnerability has prompted officials to put in place plans to deal with agroterrorism, including tests on a new tool that could improve the emergency response time.

Meanwhile, Meerdink says he's confident Illinois is prepared to handle an outbreak of animal disease. "As veterinarians, we were concerned about foreign animal diseases decades before the term bioterrorism was heard." His Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory handles more than 40,000 cases a year, mostly routine analyses submitted by veterinarians. However, he says, they do see agents like aflatoxin and anthrax, considered bioweapons, which give the staff "little scares" that hone the senses and provide a reminder to check preparedness.

"There's just been an increased awareness that as we become a more global society — people travel internationally more often — there is a higher likelihood of a new disease being introduced in the United States," says Squibb. "Foot-and-mouth disease was one example that fortunately didn't spread to the United States. Monkey pox last summer [did]. West Nile virus is another example. There's just an increased incidence in foreign diseases arriving, or threatening to arrive, in our borders."

As a result of that recognition, which preceded the attacks on September 11, 2001, the state ag department is preparing for potential threats to food crops and animals. In May, it completed a pilot program department officials could use to pinpoint every herd of cows, pigs, sheep and goats, as well as every agricultural resource related to each, such as veterinarians, possible evacuation sites for large herds of animals and food processing plants. The $22,000 federally funded project, an Internet-based geographic information system, focused on Clinton County because it ranks first for livestock sales and has the second-greatest number of hogs, says State Veterinarian Dr. Colleen O'Keefe.

The first of its kind in the nation, the mapping project was developed through the Champaign office of Science Applications International Corp., a contractor for several U.S. government agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security. The company's experts incorporated agricultural information from all available sources, including Moline-based John Deere Co., which has the largest agricultural database in the nation. The end product is a 3-D livestock emergency response tool that provides real-time information to the state ag department and the Illinois Emergency Management Agency, which houses the state's Terrorism Task Force.

When Gov. Rod Blagojevich initiated the pilot project last December, he said he would expand it to all Illinois counties if it proves successful. State ag and emergency management officials are evaluating the results of the trial run.

O'Keefe says she would look to the mapping to find a place large enough to take hundreds or thousands of animals if, for instance, there were a 1,000-pig production farm or several cattle herds feeding on grass near an area that could become contaminated.

But in the case of an intentional attack using a contagious disease introduced into a herd, the damage to animals could be magnified. "It is

Agroterrorism Hotline

The Illinois Animal Terrorism Information Hotline — 1-888-426-4767 — is available 24 hours a day for veterinarians, livestock producers and government or health officials with questions and concerns related to illnesses in their animals that are unusual or may be related to agroterrorism. Potential terrorist threats could include pesticides and nerve agents, as well as diseases such as anthrax, plague and tularemia or foreign animal diseases, such as mad cow or foot-and-mouth disease.

Information from calls to the hotline, which is staffed by specially trained veterinarians and veterinary technicians, is immediately referred to state officials. ❑

imperative that the state be able to accurately locate animals at risk, slaughter facilities and warehouses, and be able to identify environmental concerns in case of an outbreak," O'Keefe says.

That fear was heightened last December when the first cow in the United States with bovine spongiform encephalopathy, commonly called mad cow disease, was discovered in Washington state. Its introduction from outside the nation's borders prompted policy-makers to question the food safety net. Durbin, a member of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, proposed legislation in January that would strengthen livestock feed standards, improve surveillance of suspicious outbreaks of neurological disorders in livestock and broaden labeling requirements to make clear exactly what can and cannot be fed to livestock animals. The bill also would establish a national ruminant identification system to trace cases of brain wasting diseases in humans and animals. These include Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans, mad cow in cattle and chronic wasting disease in deer and elk.

"Although just one cow within the U.S. has tested positive for mad cow disease, according to the [Food and Drug Administration], the meat and meat by-products from that animal potentially contaminated 2.8 million pounds of meat, animal feed, cosmetics and other products by the time the recall order was issued," Durbin said in a printed statement.

Chalk, the Rand report author, points out that a pound of meat generally travels about 1,000 miles before it reaches the consumer's dinner table. Animals bought at auctions and cattle barns often cross several states within hours of leaving a sales yard. Tracking animals with contagious diseases, therefore, is complicated by the agricultural industry's "distant and rapid dissemination of animals from farm to market."

Another problem stems from the industry's success at streamlining: Large farm operations with thousands of animals present a new set of challenges. A disease, particularly one that is airborne, introduced at one of these facilities can infect or affect all the animals. In California in 2002, an outbreak of exotic Newcastle disease led to the slaughter of 4 million chickens.

The fear of losing an entire flock or herd — or even the stigma of quarantine — can prevent farmers from reporting an illness immediately. Also, the size of modern farms, which contributes to low-cost and plentiful food, serves to separate farmers from their livestock. Chalk contends that, without constant contact with individual animals, farmers may not notice an emerging disease until it has infected large numbers in a herd.

Meerdink of the U of I lab challenges that assertion, saying the operators of large farms watch production numbers closely and would readily recognize any problem within their herds. He says in the recent past Illinois has not seen a major outbreak of disease affecting large numbers of animals.

The Rand report offered several recommendations for policy changes to guard against an agroterrorism threat, including standardizing and streamlining food-supply and agricultural-safety measures. But, it notes, that will require "active political input and commitment."

Durbin, who is a proponent of consolidating agencies that regulate the nation's food supply, says President George W. Bush, as a candidate in 2000, came out for a single food agency. "We're now in the fourth year of his presidency, and he's not moved on it. It is a big undertaking, and you have to spend some political capital to make it happen."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Food and Drug Administration, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Department of Homeland Security all have laws, regulations and guidelines to guard the farm-to-table food supply. These, along with other, minor bureaucracies, interact with their state counterparts.

State officials say most of the time — in normal mode — information flows smoothly between federal and state agencies. Other times, particularly in relation to food recalls, it has been difficult to get answers quickly.

Durbin has introduced legislation to create a single national food agency that, he says, would bring together about a dozen federal agencies, 35 laws and scores of congressional committees into one science-driven department that has consistent standards.

"The cliches about food safety are almost laughable, were they not so maddening," says Durbin. "To have whole eggs inspected by the USDA; broken eggs inspected by the FDA. Cheese pizza inspected by the FDA; pepperoni pizza inspected by the USDA. Animals inspected by the USDA; animal feed inspected by the FDA. The list goes on and on." He adds that meat plants get daily inspections through the USDA, but meat product plants are inspected only once a year through the FDA. "One of them is right and one of them is wrong," he says, "and there is no way to reconcile this crazy patchwork quilt."

However, with reasonable scientific standards for food safety, the system could be simplified and made more understandable, he says. "In the age of food security, which we're now in, this is essential."

The Bush Administration's 2005 budget proposal includes $65 million for the Food and Drug Administration to strengthen protection of the nation's food supply. Another $264 million is for a "biosurveillance initiative," enabling the departments of Health and Human Services and Homeland Security to detect and respond to bioterrorism. And a $1.3 billion increase in spending will go to state, local and hospital bioterrorism preparedness initiatives. The ag department is slated to get $10 million for food and animal surveillance.

Indeed, the Rand report points to the elephant in the room, noting that considerable amounts of money have been devoted to defending against the relatively low-risk scenario of viral attacks aimed at human populations.

"By comparison, contingency measures for livestock and crop protection have attracted only limited support, despite the comparative ease of carrying out such attacks and the implications they pose for the economic, social and political stability of the United States." ❑

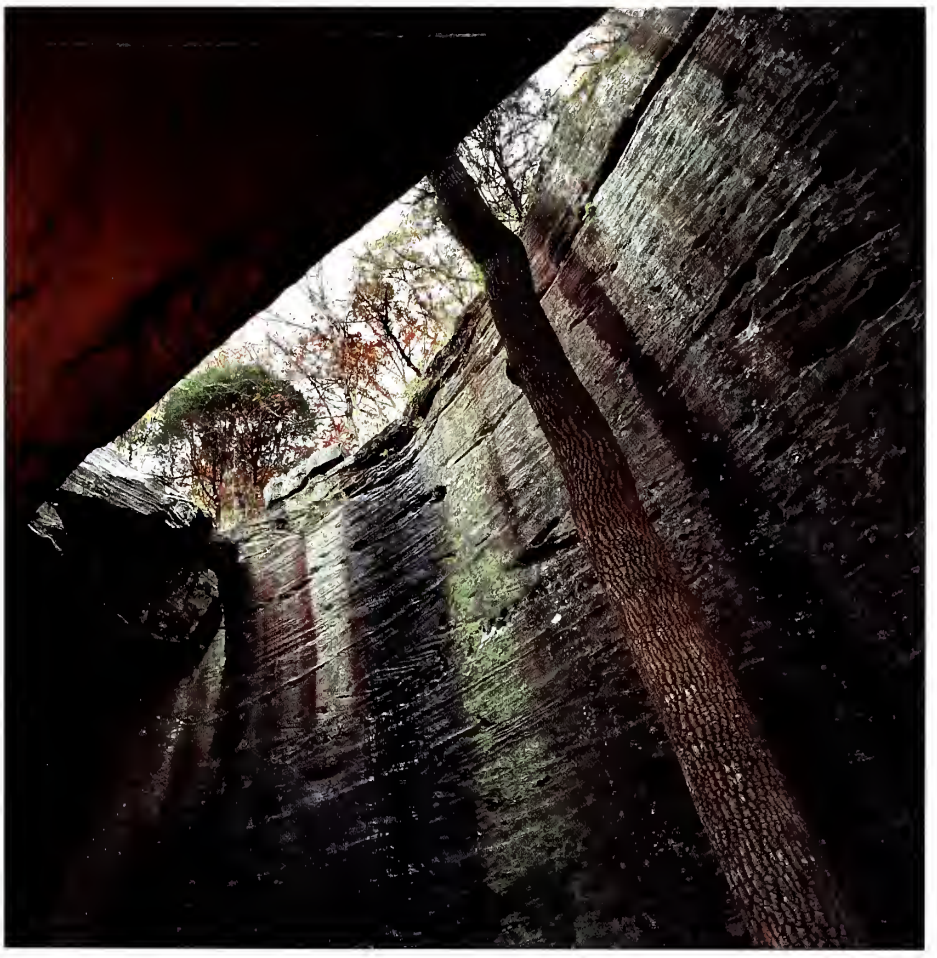
Preservation arts

Photographers capture natural Illinois from the Shawnee forest to the beach at Zion

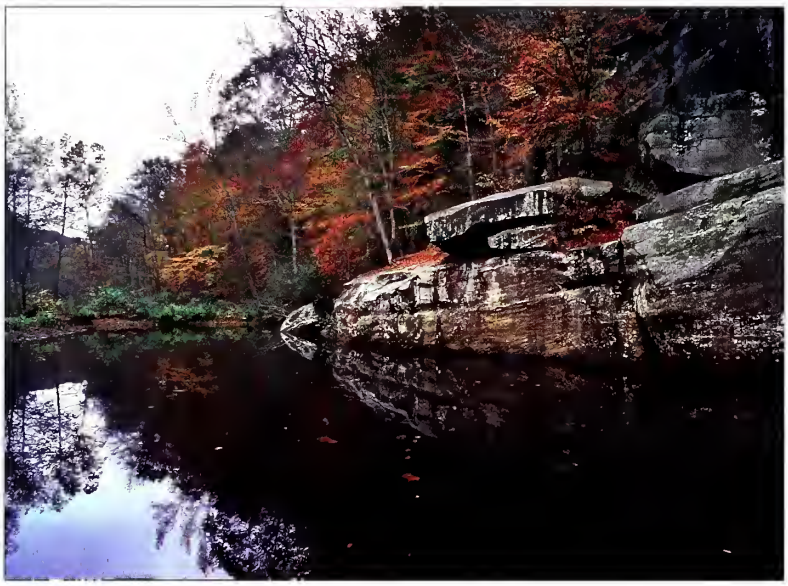
Once, vast tallgrass prairies, accented by savannas, forest-shrouded bluffs and shining rivers, lakes and ponds defined Illinois. Over the past 200 years or so, that landscape has been nearly buried under agricultural and urban development. But, primarily as a result of a variety of preservation efforts, remnants of natural Illinois have been saved or restored.

Photographs depicting some of these places appear on the next several pages, including those by photographer James Linehan, who was commissioned by the Environmental Law & Policy Center to document a decade of Midwestern environmental preservation efforts. We also feature the work of biologist Bill Glass, who has been involved in the restoration at Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie.

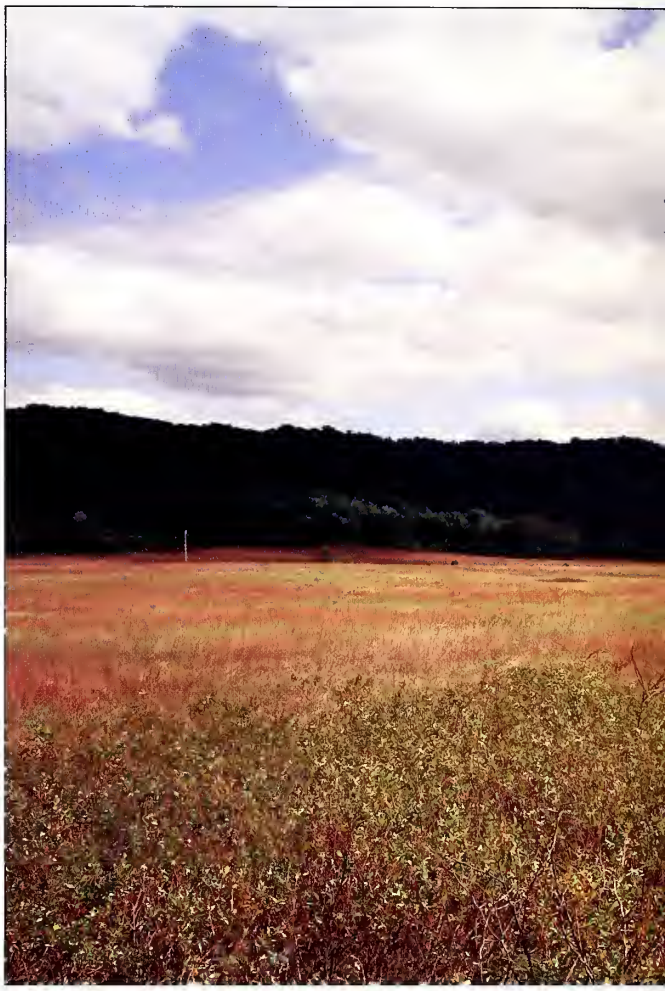
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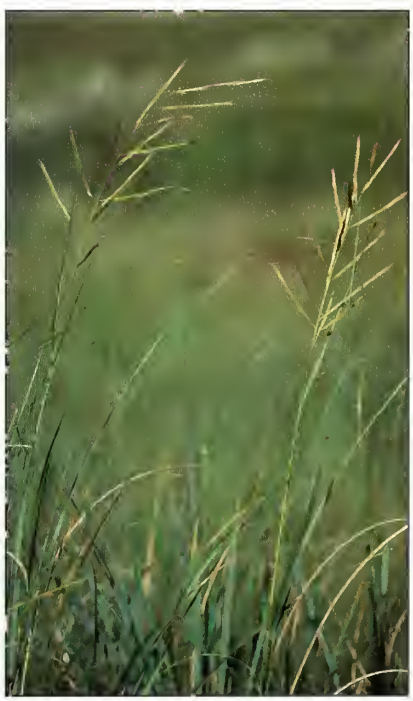
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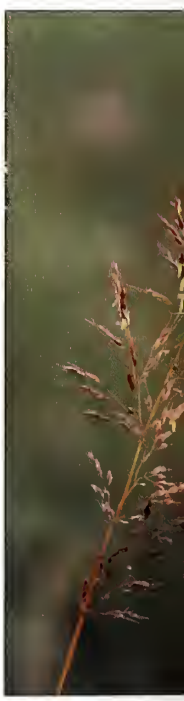
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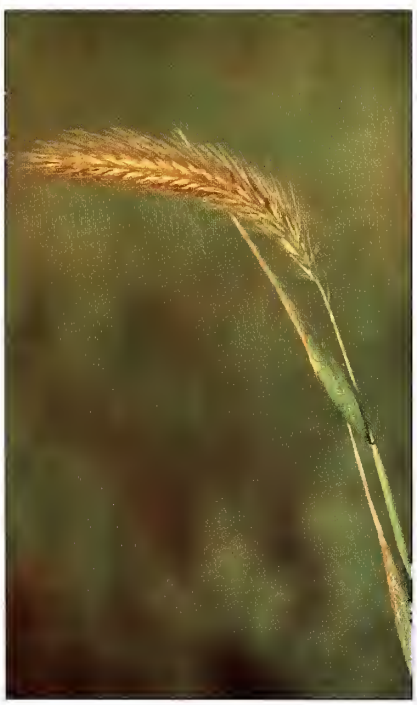
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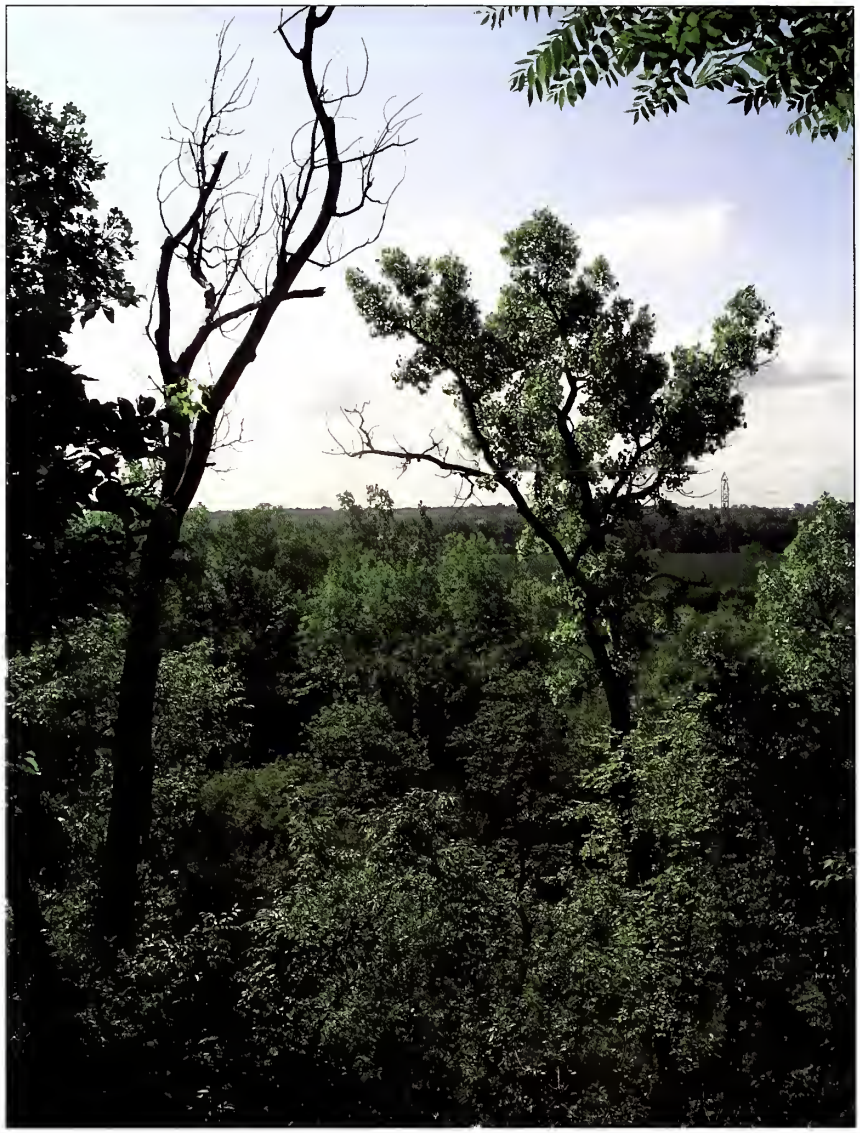
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Cougars in Illinois?

Quite a few sane and sensible citizens have concluded that *Felis concolor* dwells here again

Essay by James Krohe Jr.

Democratic governors came back to Illinois — why not cougars? Officially, Illinois has no wild cougars; the cougar is not listed as an endangered species in Illinois for the simple reason that a species can't be endangered if it doesn't exist. Donald Hoffmeister, former director of the University of Illinois' Museum of Natural History, who authored what amounts to the Debrett's of Illinois mammalia, reports that cougars were probably exterminated in Illinois before 1870. Today the only cougars in Illinois are kept in zoos and in people's homes, illegally, as pets.

Or are they? Quite a few sane and sensible citizens have concluded that the cougar dwells here again. More than 150 cougar sightings have been reported in Illinois since 1950, according to the Eastern Puma Research Network.

Cougars, or things that look like cougars, have been seen in as many places in Illinois in recent years as presidential candidates. In DeKalb County in 1990, some law enforcement authorities blamed a big cat for killing farm animals. Security staff at Fort Sheridan on Chicago's North Shore were sent on a wild cat chase in 1993 after a cougar sighting there. Multiple sightings were logged in and around Edwardsville in 1998, including at the local campus of Southern Illinois University — the home, as it happens, of the Cougars — and along Macoupin Creek near Carlinville in '03 and '04. In deep southern Illinois, cougars would seem to be as common along some back roads as pickup trucks.

The most recent spate of sightings began just after the new year in far northeast Illinois. Large wild animals were driven out of suburban Lake County long ago — the area's real estate prices would make a badger weep — but so far in 2004 some 50 residents have reported cougar-like critters. Typical was the report of at least one and maybe two cougars trespassing on a back yard in Antioch, crossing a forest preserve bicycle path and crouching, presumably with intent, at the edge of a cornfield.

It is rare to see any new firm set up shop in Illinois without a tax incentive. If a company of cougar has done so, it confirms what our pioneer forebears knew about its resourcefulness and its independence. Physically, *Felis concolor* is an admirable creature. The cougar is not a huge animal — even a strapping adult male would not make the offensive line of most high school football teams — and it has little endurance in the chase. But the cat is astonishingly agile, strong and quick, which is why so many sports teams in the state hopefully nicknamed themselves the Cougars or the Panthers.

The big cat once could be found everywhere in the state. Solitary in habit, the cat usually hunts at night, and was usually heard rather than seen. (Its peculiar scream is hair-raising.) Frontier memoirist Eliza Farnham reported that while a panther was occasionally found in the deep forest along the creek bottoms of Tazewell County when she lived there in the 1840s, none ever ventured onto the open prairies. When cat did meet human, the results — at least the results that were remembered and written about — were often bloody. The pioneer annals of life around McKee Creek in Montgomery County tell of a youth snatched off his pony and killed and partly devoured by a cat. A more typical ending was engineered by one William Huffmaster who lived on Lick Creek in Sangamon County's Loami Township. He and a neighbor are said to have treed an animal they knew as a panther; while the neighbor left to fetch a gun, Huffmaster, with the help of his dogs, caught the animal and clubbed it to death.

As one might expect in a creature that ranges across the whole of the continent, the cougar has picked up a lot of names, including catamount, painter, mountain lion and puma. In ye olde Illinois, the big cats were known almost universally as panthers. That era is recalled in the place names left behind by the state's first Euro-Americans. Illinois has no landscape feature officially named after the cougar, but the mappers of the U.S. Geological Survey list more than a dozen "Panther Creeks" along with their forks and branches, plus a Panther Grove, a Panther Hollow and a Panther Den.

Today, oddly, the animal is described by the media and government agencies as the cougar, a name that is of Indian origin. "Cougar" seems to be preferred by the wildlife experts who usually provide reporters with informed opinion, possibly to avoid confusion with the leopards of Asia and Africa, which are also known as panthers. "Panther" has always been the commonest usage in the American South, and the early preference for the term in Illinois no doubt owes to the Southern origin of so many of the state's settlers. The cat is still popularly known as the panther in southern Illinois, too; the word shift means that Illinois may be recovering a bit of its four-legged pioneer heritage as it loses a bit of its linguistic one.

To conclude that cougars are again resident in Illinois, however, is to get ahead of the facts. Not all the animals reported as cougars are cougars, and not all the cougars sighted may be wild cougars, and not all the wild cougars sighted are members of breeding populations. The Eastern Cougar Network, a nonprofit wildlife research organization whose staff zoologist is Clay Nielsen of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, confirms just one cougar in Illinois. No doubt many, even most, of the sightings owe to poor eyesight, confusion — it acquired the name "mountain lion," after all, from settlers who mistook it for a female African lion — or over-keen imaginations. One of the last belongs to businessman Virgil Smith of Harrisburg, who for years insisted that 250 to 300 cougars are living wild in Illinois as a result of a secret cougar release program run by state and federal officials. There is no such program, although to the conspiracy-minded, the fact that a government agency denies it is *ipso facto* proof of the story's accuracy. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources for years publicly demanded that Smith offer either evidence for his claims or an apology but received neither.

The secret government cougar is not the only subspecies of that cat thought to be prowling Illinois. Parts of the state seem to be suffering a plague of black panthers, which hereabouts means not leopards (the only true black panther) but the black or melanistic form of the cougar. The Eastern Puma Research Network, not to be confused with the science-based Eastern Cougar Network, calculated that up to a third of more than 600 cougar sightings in the eastern United States from 1983 to 1989 involved black panthers — a much higher proportion than in the western United States. In Illinois, the incidence was even higher; a majority of the sightings made around Shawnee National Forest in that period were of black animals. In Decatur, farther north, so many black panthers have been spotted since the 1950s that the city has become famous among paranormals, who regard a black cat that can weigh up to 160 pounds as the Cadillac Escalade of portents.

The problem is, it is not certain that the cougar has a melanistic form, at least in North America. Black pumas are known in South America, where the pet cougars sold in this country originate. That raises the possibility that people are seeing escaped or released pets. But pet black cougars would have to be as commonplace in Illinois as cocker spaniels to explain so many sightings over so many years.

The mystery cats attracted to Illinois a member of Britain's Centre for Fortean Zoology, which calls itself the only professional, scientific and full-time organization in the world dedicated to cryptozoology, or the study of unknown animals. His investigation, like all such investigations, came to no conclusion. Dozens of sightings have yielded very few bits of indisputable forensic evidence of the animal's presence, such as pawprints or scat, which is why skeptics lump the Illinois black panther with other mythic creatures such as Bigfoot and the compassionate conservative.

There seems little doubt that most of the animals perceived as cougars, whatever their color, are probably coyotes or feral dogs. In 1986, sleepy residents of a Waukegan apartment complex reported a lion on the premises; the animal turned out to be an escaped junkyard dog whose owner had given him a lion-type haircut to scare off prowlers. One of this year's sightings in Lake County — reported by a woman who called police to tell them she was trailing a cougar by car near the town of Wadsworth — turned out to be a coyote. And examination of at least three sets of suspect pawprints collected during the most recent Lake County hoo-ha led wildlife experts to declare them those of a canine.

Plenty of credible witnesses remain convinced that what they have seen was no dog. Most experts reply that while there may indeed be cougars out there, they are merely escaped or abandoned pets or circus animals. It can be assumed that many cougars are being kept as pets or in makeshift zoos in Illinois, as are other exotic creatures that could easily be mistaken for cougars. That such animals sometimes escape was confirmed in 2000 and 2001 when two former pet cougars were found by Department of Natural Resources staff roaming downstate Illinois.

Ecologists may find the distinction between a wild cougar and an escaped or abandoned pet to be essential, but it may strike many people as meaningless. A cougar is a cougar, and if it is at large and living successfully in the wild, it is, for all practical purposes, a wild animal. A hiker who is having her arm chewed off by a big cat will find the question of whether it is a released pet from the South American genetic line or a migrant into Illinois from North American wild stock to be interesting but, under the circumstances, not very urgent.

Twenty years ago it was reasonable to assume that any big cat found in Illinois had to have been carried into it in a box. But 20 years of enlightened green policies since then have left the midcontinent crisscrossed with wild-ish places that serve as stepping stones on which animals can safely cross otherwise inhospitable terrain. Illinois offers plenty of habitat in the forests of southern Illinois or the wooded river valleys. Even in suburban Lake County, a big cat would find 25,000 acres of forest in preserves along the Des Plaines River and plentiful food in the form of deer; indeed, Lake County would be to a hungry cat what a government job used to be for humans.

That some cats are exploring this

part of the Midwest is known. In 2000, a cougar was killed by a train in Randolph County. Wildlife experts at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale who examined its carcass found that the animal showed no signs of captive rearing. It had the remnants of a deer fawn in its belly, not pet food, and its DNA confirmed it to have been of North American origin rather than of South American stock, as would be true of an escaped or released pet. Investigators reporting the finding in the *Transactions of the Illinois State Academy of Science* described it as "the first confirmed occurrence of a cougar in Illinois in over 100 years."

It is hard to imagine that this unlucky cat is the only cougar to find life in Illinois to its liking. The species is wide-ranging, and for years has been slowly recolonizing parts of North America from which it was driven long ago. Migrants from established populations in Canada and the western United States have penetrated the Great Plains, the upper Midwest and the East. (Cougars moving south from the Black Hills have popped up in Nebraska, for example.) The known cougar populations closest to Illinois are in Texas and Colorado. The Eastern Cougar Network has confirmed seven cougars in Missouri and three in Iowa. Cougars may also have set up shop, as it were, in the Arkansas Ozarks and in eastern Kentucky. To an animal that can cover a hundred miles in a day, this is just up the street.

One stray cat in Randolph County does not prove the presence of breeding populations of wild cougars, but if the big cats are not yet permanent residents, it seems inevitable that they will be soon.

What then for state and local government policy? For decades it has been general policy to protect most of Illinois' remnant wildlife from people. The fruit of that policy is the return to Illinois of large wild animals of more types than the state has seen in more than a century. River otters again grace its large rivers, and bobcats are making life interesting for small animals in some forests. Coyotes are as common in Illinois as highway potholes, and beavers are again re-engineering the

Photograph by Gerald and Buff Corsi, courtesy of the California Academy of Sciences



A captive cougar in Kalispell, Montana

state's waterways. Deer are so plentiful that many suburban gardeners would welcome the help of a hungry cougar to teach them manners.

But while such critters are wild they are not very wild — not like the wolf or bear or cougar. The renewed presence of these large predators will force authorities to ponder how to protect people from wildlife for the first time since the days when the state paid its citizens a bounty for every wolf they killed. Recent fatal attacks by cougars on adult humans in the West shocked wildlife experts as well as residents because all their textbooks had insisted the cougar is a timid creature in the presence of people. Modern hunting bans, however, have created generations of animals that have lost much of their fear of humans. A policy of protecting animals may be making people more vulnerable.

As long as cougars don't try to turn property owners into prey, the larger public seems likely to remain less afraid than curious. In Lake County, when the scent of cougars is in the air, the county has warned residents to keep pets inside the house. But the sudden appearance of an elegant and exotic creature in a part of the state not famous for either elegance or exoticism is diverting, if only because it gives everyone something to talk about with the neighbors other than traffic jams around Gurnee.

In this they could not differ more from the region's pioneer forebears, who would have reached for a rifle if they saw a cougar. Today, residents are likely to reach for the video camera. This may mark us not as braver than our ancestors, merely less experienced. In a world in which we enjoy an unnatural absence of danger from wild beasts, our natural fear of big cats has been misplaced. Today we know them only from the sanitized images from TV wildlife documentaries and the zombie-ized specimens trapped in zoos. We no longer appreciate their wildness or their strength.

Is our collective fear of wild animals really gone? Or is it merely forgotten, tucked away in our mental attics because we no longer need it in an Illinois in which the only predators most of us face are on the highways? "Once we were as hunted as rabbits, as vulnerable as mice," wrote *Chicago Tribune* columnist Bill Stokes in 1991, "and perhaps therein is the reason for our perverted fascination with the untamed unknown. In the deepest recesses of our being, maybe we hark back with an odd nostalgia to a time when there were cougars staring at us from the darkness of the forests."

Nostalgia? Not quite. But the prospect of meeting a dangerous wild animal makes us momentarily alive again in a way that our pampered existence seldom requires. That alone may be reason enough to welcome them back to Illinois. ❑

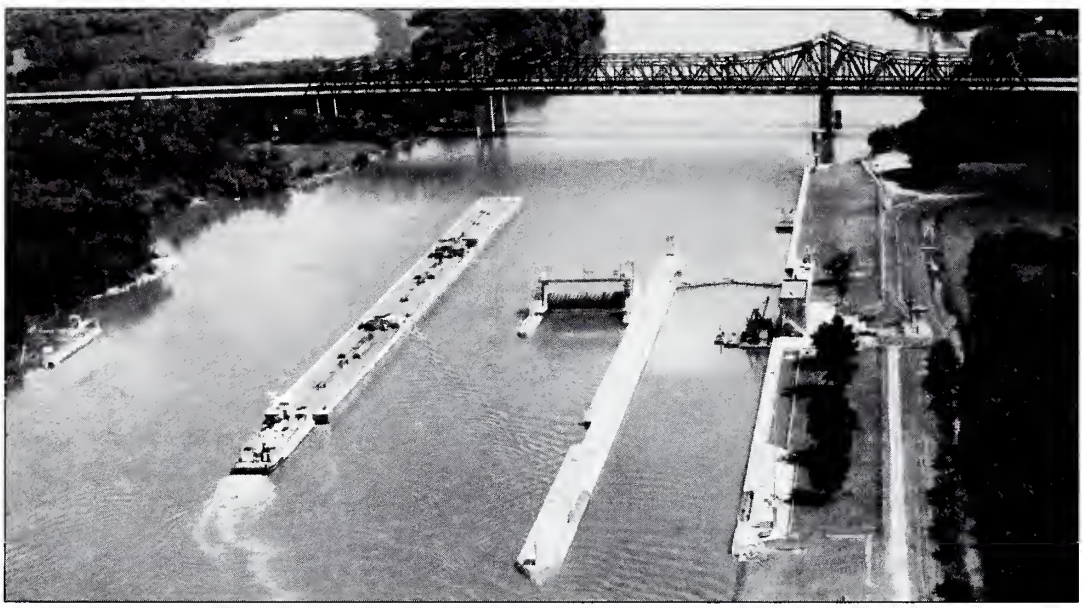
James Krohe Jr., a veteran commentator on Illinois public issues, is writing a guide to the state's history and culture for the Illinois Humanities Council.

Water commerce

Efforts to clear barge congestion have churned up more than a decade of controversy. Officials may now be settling on a plan

by Pat Guinane

Photograph courtesy of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers



The Peoria lock on the Illinois River

Measuring roughly four football fields in length, today's standard barge is simply too long for the locks and dams directing traffic along the upper Mississippi River. Consequently, shipments of corn, soybeans and other raw goods stall substantially along Illinois' western border. But efforts to clear congestion on the Mississippi, a major commercial artery of the nation, have churned up more than a decade of controversy, the turbid depths of which are still being explored.

While a proposed lock expansion project would put some additional stress on the river ecosystem, environmental groups say a multibillion dollar overhaul shouldn't happen without designating money to mitigate the degradation that has accrued since 1930, when the locks began directing river traffic. And they agree with taxpayer groups, who argue that reconfiguring the river controls would represent an undeserved handout for the agricultural industry. They point to statistics showing stagnant growth in barge traffic over the past 20 years and predict minimal increases over the next five decades.

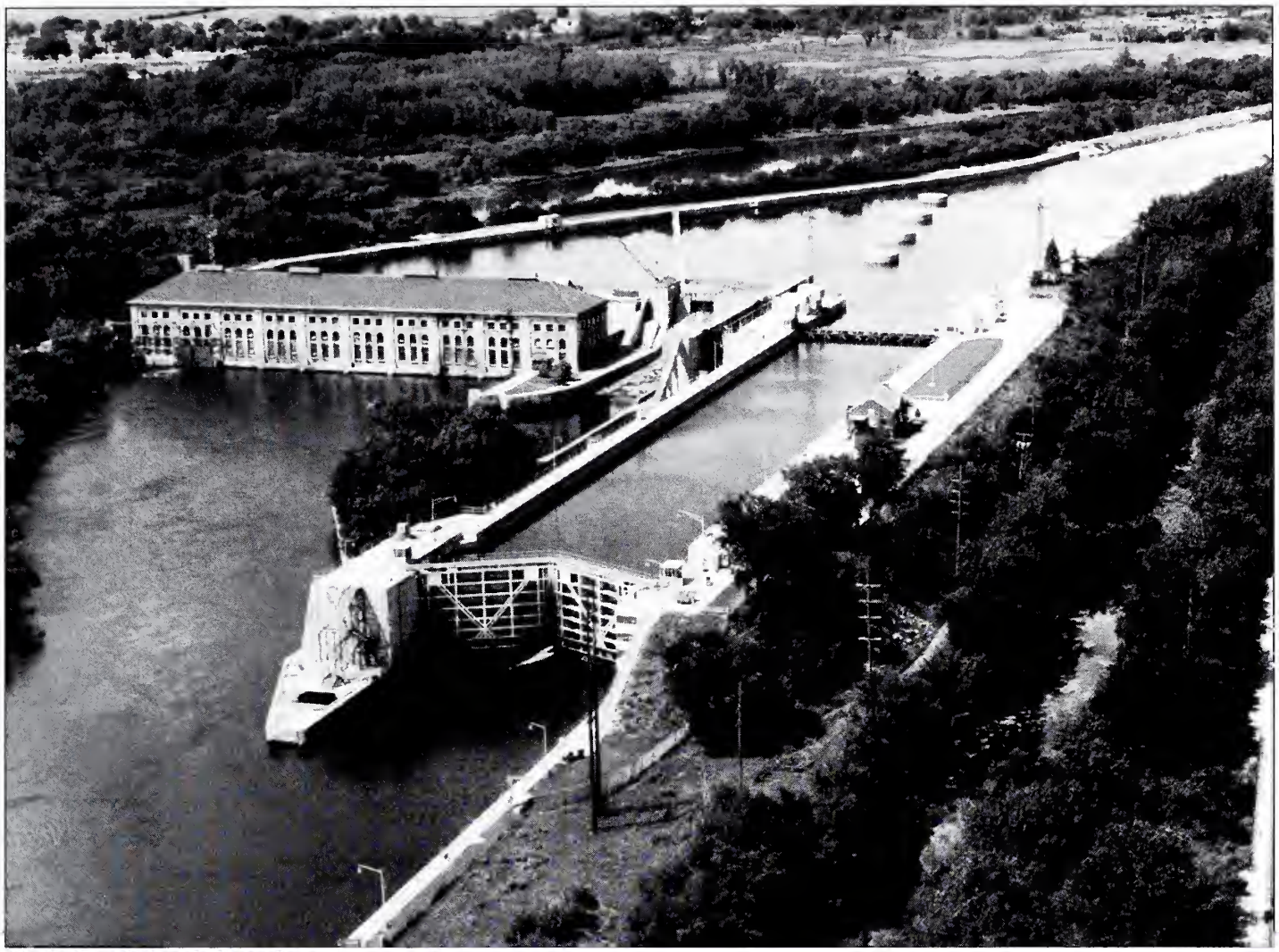
Those arguments are at the core of a controversy that halted lock expansion efforts four years ago. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the federal agency that has spent 11 years and $70.6 million studying the issue, was scheduled in 2001 to deliver a report charting the river's future for five decades to come.

The corps was weighing the economic benefits of installing new, longer locks where congestion strains the flow of commerce. As it turns out, the scale was rigged. In early 2000, Donald Sweeney, a senior economist from the corps' St. Louis District, came forward with evidence senior officials manipulated data to justify the project after the study initially found that lock expansions weren't worth the cost. A few months later, a corps economist working out of Rock Island backed up Sweeney's allegations.

Shortly after, the study was suspended, restructured, then restarted.

Now the corps has nearly finished the report, and, in late June, completed a series of public hearings in Washington, D.C., Peoria, Quincy and five other Midwest river towns. Up for debate was a 613-page draft complete with a $7.7 billion price tag. Of that, $2.4 billion would go toward construction. The other $5.3 billion would go toward a 50-year plan aimed at reversing

Photograph courtesy of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers



The Lockport lock on the Illinois River

ecosystem degradation caused by damming large sections of the river, which environmentalists say has created stair-step slack-water pools that alter water and sediment flow, eliminate islands and wetlands, and destroy fish and wildlife habitats.

"The real issue is about money. The impacts that are greatest to the environment from the lock-and-dam system are from the system that's already in place. We've had 70 years of buildup of impacts that have not been mitigated," says Mark Beorkrem, executive director of the Illinois Stewardship Alliance, a group representing small farmers on agricultural and conservation issues. "This whole battle has been to say, OK, acknowledge that the system was degraded, acknowledge that you have to have a daily management plan for the river and start allocating the money for it."

The lock expansion plan advocated by the Army Corps also would require $200 million to offset new environmental impacts, that, if left unmitigated, could result in 28 million fewer fish, increase sedimentation at 31 sites and degrade 28 miles of plant beds. The construction could increase erosion on 11 miles of shoreline, which would threaten an eagle nest and two heron rookeries along the Mississippi. And that erosion could harm more than 100 sites of potential archaeological significance along the Illinois and Mississippi rivers. Taxpayers would pick up most of the tab.

In Congress, a bipartisan group of U.S. senators from Illinois and other states that use the waterway supports a $3.1 billion plan that dedicates slightly more than half of the money to implement an initial 15 years of ecosystem restoration. Congress began considering the plan in late June, and the numbers are likely to fluctuate, with the lock-and-dam expansion expected to become part of a nationwide biennial water projects spending bill. The Senate plan, like the Army Corps' proposal, would spend $1.46 billion to build five new 1,200-foot Mississippi locks, four along the Missouri border and one at Quincy. On the Illinois River, new 1,200-foot locks would be added at Peoria and 90 miles southwest at LaGrange in Brown County. That would allow all 1,200 feet of today's 15-barge tows to pass through in a single shot. The current 600-foot locks — all constructed before 1940 — force crews to break their tows in two then reconnect once outside the locks, a two-hour process in fair

weather. During the 1990s that extra labor led to average delays of nearly three and a half hours at the five Mississippi locks lawmakers want to lengthen.

Half of the construction costs would be paid from a trust fund barge owners finance through a 20-cent tax on diesel fuel. Taxpayers would pick up the other $730 million.

Critics say the industry can get by without the new locks. They would rather see the corps endorse less obtrusive alternatives, which include providing "helper" tugboats at the locks, adding mooring cells to help barges steer in and out of the locks and developing a coordinated barge-traffic schedule.

"Unfortunately, as far as the corps is concerned, if all you have is a hammer, everything in the world looks like a nail. In the corps' lexicon, the only way to help agriculture in the Midwest is to build longer locks. That makes little or no sense," says David Conrad, senior water resources specialist for the National Wildlife Federation. "It is quite possible to substantially reduce congestion at some of the key congestion points by putting in a scheduling system like the airlines use. This is not rocket science, and you could probably run that system on anybody's PC these days."

Industry groups say the expansion would encourage more barge traffic, alleviating semi-truck traffic and air pollution. One 15-barge tow can carry the equivalent of 870 semis, or more than two 100-car trains. And any lock construction would be accompanied by environmental enhancements.

While the corps' plan calls for $5.3 billion in ecosystem restoration, the Senate plan would allocate $1.66 billion for the first 15 years. Most of the money earmarked for the environment comes from federal tax dollars, but the affected states — Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois and Missouri — would be required to provide a 35 percent match for projects along riverbanks that are not federally controlled. Of the five states, Illinois has the most nonfederal shoreline, which would force the state to put up 59 percent of the $367.9 million in matching money. That amounts to $216.5 million over 50 years. Through the first 15 years, the state, possibly with the help of nonprofit and local sources, would have to come up with $75.6 million.

The money would go primarily toward floodplain restoration projects, but the state would not take farmland away from unwilling sellers, says Gary Clark, water resources director for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

Still, environmental groups argue the Senate plan wouldn't do enough to reverse decades of harm inflicted upon an ecosystem that supports more than 500 species, including 40 percent of the continent's migratory waterfowl. Some worry the remaining 35 years of environmental funding could evaporate.

The environmentalists find themselves aligned with taxpayer groups that argue the project is simply a waste of money. Since 1975, the Army Corps has spent $900 million on lock-and-dam renovations. And the whistleblower revelations of 2000 buttress criticism of the corps' economic forecasts.

"There is no shortage of critics of the United States Army Corps of Engineers and its methods, but we can all agree that, to remain competitive, America needs to keep these arteries and veins of American river transportation systems in smooth running order," says Royce Wilken, president of ARTCO, the barge fleet division of Decatur's Archer Daniels Midland.

Longer locks, placed alongside the existing passageways, could alleviate delays at bottlenecks along the Mississippi. But commercial barge traffic grew by only 2.2 percent a year from 1965 to 2002, actually declining in the 1990s. The corps' report largely relies on forecasts for increased grain exports to justify the expansions. It cites a recent estimate from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's chief economist that suggests corn exports through the Gulf of Mexico will increase by at least 29 percent over the next 10 years. The upper Mississippi handles about half of all U.S. corn exports, which measured 52 billion tons last year.

Surging corn shipments would lift overall grain movement 35 percent by 2050 under the most optimistic of five corps economic forecasts. But American grain exports face fierce competition from rapidly expanding operations in Brazil and Argentina.

"As our locks and dams are now old enough to qualify for Social Security and Medicare, we have competitors down in South America who have invested millions of dollars into their transportation system and put theirs on steroids and are rapidly catching up with us and threaten to surpass us," says Rick Tolan, CEO of the National Corn Growers Association and president of the Midwest Area River Coalition 2000, an umbrella organization of agricultural and shipping interests that support lock expansion.

But while one side stokes the pride of American grain producers, the other says South America will invariably undercut our prices simply by continuing to create new farmland at blazing speed. The same critics also argue that crop demand is growing within the United States, where grains can be shipped by rail and used to make ethanol and other "value added" products. Those concerns appear to play into the least optimistic 50-year economic model presented by the corps, which shows grain movement along the river system dropping 24 percent. The corps presents only one model for nonfarm commodities. It forecasts a 21 percent boost in barge travel for petrochemicals, coal, steel and other nonfarm commodities, with shipments increasing from 45 million tons to 66.3 million tons.

The economic debate played out at this summer's public hearings. In Peoria, some 50 speakers took to the microphone, most to show support and, perhaps, prod the project along. A few with environmental or other concerns stepped forward. But even the slightly agitated man who simply identified himself as a taxpayer admitted it is hard to get overly upset about a construction project that would cost less than a month of war in Iraq. It was farmer after farmer after farmer who spoke in support of expanding the locks — a voice Congress is likely to hear when it receives the Army Corps' final report this fall. ❑

Sandra Steingraber

A cancer survivor, the author and ecologist is an internationally recognized expert on environmental links to cancer. Steingraber, a Pekin native, wrote Living Downstream: A Scientist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment, *which connected for the first time data on toxic releases and then-recent U.S. cancer registries. Her other works include* Having Faith: An Ecologist's Journey to Motherhood, *which discusses fetal toxicology and the environmental hazards that threaten infant development.*

Steingraber served on President Bill Clinton's National Action Plan on Breast Cancer and, during international treaty negotiations in 1999, she briefed U.N. delegates in Geneva, Switzerland, on dioxin contamination of breast milk. That year, the Sierra Club dubbed Steingraber "the new Rachel Carson" and she has been named a Woman of the Year by Ms. Magazine.

An interdisciplinary distinguished visiting scholar at Ithaca College in New York, Steingraber most recently was a faculty member at Cornell University's Center for the Environment. She has a doctorate in biology from the University of Michigan, a master's in English from Illinois State University and has had visiting fellowships at such institutions as the University of Illinois and Radcliffe/Harvard.

She spoke with Projects Editor Beverley Scobell, who lives about a mile from the site of the Formosa chemical plant explosion in Illiopolis. This is an edited version of their conversation.

Q. *You wrote recently about the chemical plant explosion in Illiopolis. Why is that compelling to you?*

Central Illinois is my homeland. It's still my most beloved landscape. Any environmental disaster that happens in the place I grew up catches my attention and affects me emotionally.

Photograph by Frank DiMeo, courtesy of Cornell University



Sandra Steingraber

But other than the deep connection I feel with that part of the world, I think it's also a telling story. Formosa Plastics USA is part of a larger group that goes back to Formosa Plastics in Taiwan. They are the world's largest manufacturer of PVC, polyvinyl chloride, which is a very toxic chemical, from the point of its manufacture, including its use, all the way up to its disposal. The explosion in Illiopolis is a microcosm of a much larger international debate going on around this chemical. In fact, it's being phased out of use by the medical industry, as well as being shunned by architects and designers because of some its health and environmental problems.

The vinyl the Illiopolis plant made turned into floors. So what I'm interested in as a writer, as well as a biologist, is taking common objects in people's lives, like their floors they mop every week, and what I want them to see are incinerated workers and a contaminated community, to really make the connection between the objects we use and the places they come from.

The hope is, of course, in revealing those connections that we'll move toward something better. There is no reason why the Illiopolis plant couldn't be rebuilt to make linoleum floors. Linoleum is a hot material in building in Europe, and it's a hot item here, but there are no U.S. manufacturers of linoleum flooring anymore.

Why not turn Illiopolis into the first domestic manufacturer of linoleum? People could be employed, and we wouldn't have to worry about 40,000 pounds every year of a known human carcinogen, namely vinyl chloride, contaminating Illiopolis for people to have kitchen floors. The people of Illiopolis are paying a needless price with their health so that other people can have kitchen floors when we can do it cheaper and better using other materials.

Q. *I have raised two daughters within a mile of the Formosa plastics plant and now, as adults and scientists themselves, they worry about what they might be carrying in their bodies. What are the effects on people living that close to a plant that uses polyvinyl chloride in its manufacturing process?*

You can't make PVC without releasing vinyl chloride, the raw ingredient from which polyvinyl chloride is made. It's a very volatile chemical, and it leaks out of the manufacturing plant and into the community at large.

Vinyl chloride is on a really short list of chemicals that are known human carcinogens, meaning we have absolutely no doubt that it causes cancer in humans. Other members on that list include tobacco smoke, asbestos, benzine — there's actually a pretty short list. A substance has to be really bad to be called a known human carcinogen, and vinyl chloride meets those qualifications.

We know that it causes cancer, and we know that vinyl chloride manufacturing plants release vinyl chloride routinely into the environment, and it goes beyond the fenceline of the plant. We have evidence of that, not just in Illiopolis, but other vinyl chloride plants in Texas, Louisiana,

California and Pennsylvania. Vinyl chloride causes a form of liver cancer.

It also releases in its manufacture dioxin, which is also a known human carcinogen, and it's potent in vanishingly small quantities: parts per trillion. And besides causing cancer, dioxin has the ability to mimic some of the effects of our own hormones. In some cases it can act like an estrogen. In other cases, it blocks the estrogen, depending on where in the body, the uterus or the breasts. It can interfere with thyroid hormone.

Nobody makes dioxin on purpose, unlike vinyl chloride. It doesn't have any known use. But it gets made by accident during the manufacturing process of certain kinds of things, and PVC manufacturing is one that makes this by-product. Dioxin has a long half-life; it can last in human tissues for up to 50 years. It tends to be very fat viable. That's why women are more at risk, because women tend to have more fat in our bodies than men do, and we have things like breasts, which have a lot of fat in them. So I think it's a women's issue, as well as a health issue for the whole community.

At the end of its life, say you want to remodel and you tear up that kitchen flooring, or take off the vinyl siding or throw away your vinyl blinds, there's no good way to dispose of vinyl. You can't recycle it. There's way too much chlorine in it. When PVC is made into consumer products, you have to add plasticizers because PVC by itself is very brittle. These plasticizers are called phthalates, and they themselves are toxic and suspected of causing cancer and are known endocrine disrupters.

Furthermore, when you dispose of these things in landfills, the phthalates come out and either evaporate into the surrounding air of the community near the landfill or contaminate groundwater. You can't safely landfill PVC. Nor can you burn it because, when you put it in an incinerator, it releases large amounts of dioxin and also large amounts of hydrochloric acid.

So here you have this product that kills workers, contaminates communities where it's manufactured, then when you're all done with it, you can't safely get rid of it. And there's more interesting evidence to suggest that PVC, when it's in your home, contributes to respiratory distress. Part of that is because these phthalate plasticizers and other volatile gases are given off. You know the smell of a new PVC shower curtain. It actually contains a whole stew of chemicals that can contaminate the indoor air. There's pretty good evidence coming out of Europe that asthma in children can be exacerbated, if not caused, by PVC building materials in the home. So for all those reasons, designers and architects are really starting to look twice and looking for nontoxic substitutes for it.

Q: *Your book* Living Downstream *gives a sobering account of the dangers to people and animals from synthetic chemicals. Describe the educational journey that brought you to the writing of that book.*

I was diagnosed with bladder cancer in between my sophomore and junior years of college at Illinois Wesleyan. At the time, I was a pretty high-achieving biology major who had thought that my interests in creative writing were now behind me. I had made the decision that I was going to go into sciences rather than literature, which is my other big passion.

After I got out of the hospital, I started reading around the medical literature about the cancer I had. It didn't take long to learn it's considered a quintessential environmental cancer, meaning we know more about the links between the environment and bladder cancer than almost any kind of cancer.

Also, not knowing how long I was going to be healthy and able to continue going to college, I decided I wasn't willing to give up my other interests. So I started a career path — one I'm still on — of not choosing. I kind of alternate between poetry and biology.

While at Harvard [to do a poetry fellowship], I began to get compelled by some of the activist work, the women's cancer community, and took up the question of what caused my own cancer: How are the environment and cancer related? So I began the four-year process of researching and writing *Living Downstream*.

The book came out in 1997 and I traveled around the world with it for about a year and a half. A lot of what I did was take the book to communities like Illiopolis, small towns where people had concerns about a manufacturing facility or an incinerator or whatever culture was practiced there.

So I sat down with a lot of Montana wheat farmers in a church basement on a Friday night to talk about the link between certain kinds of weed killers and certain kinds of lymphomas. I talked with native Alaskan women in northern Alaska about certain kinds of chemicals leaking from military bases and how they were contaminating the fish and how they were worried about their breast milk. I got to talk to some Irish sheep farmers about some of the insecticide chemicals they use that had contaminated their drinking water wells.

So I came away feeling like the question I was interested in personally was a question on a lot of people's minds right now: How is our health and the health of the environment interrelated?

It was really interesting for me as a biologist to look at the evidence. And I was interested as a creative writer to find a compelling way to write about the evidence, so that it wasn't just a research book, that I could tell a human story that people would read. As a cancer survivor I am very aware that behind every data point there is a human life.

Q: *Have you seen any changes, either for the better or worse, since you wrote* Living Downstream*?*

Oh yes, all kinds of changes for the better. It's a different world now than in 1997 when the book came out. Now, when I talk with people about the book, they are not hearing about it for the first time. They already know what the evidence is or they're already convinced. Now they want to know what can we do? How can we take action? ❑

PURE AND PLENTIFUL

From the Great Lakes to unseen streams, efforts to protect this vital resource are critical, say two environmental groups

Photograph by John Nelson, courtesy of ChicagoPaddling.org



Illinois Beach State Park, Zion

REGION SHOULD SAVE THE GREAT LAKES

by Michele DePhilip

To most people, the Great Lakes region appears to have an infinite supply of fresh water. But like all natural resources, these waters are neither inexhaustible nor indestructible. They are finite and vulnerable.

The North American Great Lakes Basin — Lakes Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie and Ontario — and its tributary watershed is the largest freshwater system on Earth. The Great Lakes, spanning the border between the United States and Canada, hold 95 percent of the surface fresh water in North America and nearly 20 percent of the world's fresh water.

But the way in which water is withdrawn and redistributed in and out of the basin — in essence, disruptions in natural water levels and flows in rivers, lakes and underground aquifers — impacts the Great Lakes freshwater ecosystems. These repercussions stem from dams, irrigation, land development, stormwater management and withdrawals for municipal and industrial uses that fail to consider the consequences, individually and collectively, on ecosystem health.

Exploitation of these freshwater resources has led to dry wells, groundwater contamination, pollution of waterways, the collapse of fisheries, the prevalence of invasive species and insufficient flows for fresh water-dependent plants and animals. Exploitation has negatively affected water quality and has led to local conflicts between the need for drinking water and water for industrial and agricultural uses.

We rely on freshwater ecosystems to help us hydrate, navigate, irrigate, filtrate, assimilate, generate, recreate and satiate. The Great Lakes ecosystem juggles these services. But for the ecosystem to have the stamina to perform this complicated balancing act, it must itself be healthy.

In Illinois, as in many other Great Lakes states and provinces, water becomes a problem when there is too much or too little. Although floods and droughts occur naturally, we often aggravate the impacts natural wet and dry cycles have on communities.

Although Illinois includes a relatively small stretch of Lake Michigan shoreline, the importance of the Great Lakes to Illinois cannot be underestimated.

Each year in the Chicago metropolitan area, an estimated 10.2 billion to 23.7 billion gallons of water can no longer recharge aquifers and surface waters because we have created impervious surfaces. Essentially, this water, which would naturally replenish water supplies, flows elsewhere and is lost to the system. Instead, "excess" water flows over land, into sewers and pipes, and ultimately discharges into rivers that are swollen beyond capacity.

Although Illinois includes a relatively small stretch of Lake Michigan shoreline, the importance of the Great Lakes to Illinois cannot be underestimated. Twenty percent of the demand for Great Lakes water comes from the Chicago-Milwaukee region. We need to encourage governance that supports careful management of our fresh water from the Great Lakes.

The states and provinces that border the Great Lakes are developing regional water policy to conserve the supply and protect the ecosystem. Requests to export water out of the region, coupled with increasing shortages in other parts of North America, have led the region's state and provincial leaders to the realization they need stronger laws to defend their decisions about proposed withdrawals and diversions. The proposed policy is designed to ensure that ecosystems are not harmed, but are actually improved by water management projects.

Currently, the states and provinces of the Great Lakes region have a number of agreements and legal mechanisms in place that guide collective management of the waters of the Great Lakes — for example, the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909, the Great Lakes Charter of 1985 and the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement of 1972, 1978 and 1987. But stronger laws and better governance are needed.

Photograph courtesy of The Nature Conservancy



Michele DePhilip is an aquatic ecologist for The Nature Conservancy.

In 2001, the Great Lakes region's 10 governors and Canadian premiers signed an agreement to draft a new decision-making standard for judging proposed water projects (withdrawals and diversions). This new standard will be based on the following principles, as paraphrased from the Great Lakes Charter Annex, 2001:

- Preventing or minimizing basin water loss through return flow, and implementing environmentally sound and economically feasible water conservation measures;
- Avoiding significant adverse individual or cumulative impacts to the quantity or quality of the waters and water-dependent natural resources of the Great Lakes Basin;
- Complying with applicable state, provincial and international laws and treaties; and
- Improving the waters and water-dependent natural resources of the Great Lakes Basin.

In other words, a proposal to use water will be approved only if the waters and water-dependent natural resources are better off after the project than before it.

For the past three years, since the Great Lakes Charter Annex was signed, the states and provinces have worked diligently to establish a comprehensive governance system for future water withdrawals from the Great Lakes. This summer, they will release a draft for public comment.

The governance structure needs to improve management of the Great Lakes and their tributaries and ensure that the standard applies consistently across all eight states and two provinces.

The cities, states, provinces and federal governments, as well as the industries, environmental groups and outdoor enthusiasts, need to unite in their desire to protect the Great Lakes. As an example, in Chicago's Water Agenda 2003, Mayor Richard Daley declared his support for the Great Lakes governors and premiers in their effort to establish a governance system for future withdrawals of Great Lakes water.

If properly designed, this regional policy will prevent harmful diversions, improve efficiency of water use, advance water management practices that will benefit Great Lakes ecosystems, and ensure sustainable water supplies for generations to come. If carried out as currently planned, this system would be the first effort in the world to link protective use of a natural system with its restoration.

The Nature Conservancy supports the states and provinces in their efforts to develop a comprehensive water governance system that goes beyond "do no harm" to actually restoring the Great Lakes for people and for ecosystems. New regional water policy is a critical step to ensure the vitality of this resource for Illinois' future. ❑

Michele DePhilip is an aquatic ecologist for The Nature Conservancy, an international nonprofit organization focused on preserving natural communities and the lands and waters that support them.

STATE SHOULD MEET WATER GOALS

by Albert Ettinger

The federal Clean Water Act is arguably one of the most successful statutes in history. Certainly as a result, the quality of many of Illinois' rivers has improved.

Though the extent of this improvement is not clear because we lack data on many pollutants in the state's waterways, there are some examples. The Illinois River and the Chicago River, once severely impaired by municipal and industrial pollution, now have healthier fisheries and are rightly seen as natural and recreational assets. And while sprawl threatens advances, better wastewater treatment has improved such rivers as the Fox and the Sangamon.

Yet more progress is needed if Illinois' water bodies are to meet the "fishable and swimmable" goals of the Clean Water Act.

Such progress is possible if the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency is given sufficient funds, if new wastewater permit fees charged to industries and municipalities are maintained and if flaws in Illinois' implementation of federal law are remedied.

First, the EPA's budget hasn't kept pace with increasing challenges and responsibilities. The state must substantially increase the budget for water programs just to meet the minimum requirements of the federal law. That budget has been essentially frozen, though it's clear that many millions of dollars more are needed to address known water quality problems.

As soon as possible, the dollars raised through the new National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System wastewater permit fees must be expended to maintain and restore Illinois' water quality. Additional sources of funding also must be sought if the goals of the Clean Water Act are to be realized in Illinois. The state should consider implementing a bond issue addressing water quality problems, such as those approved in other states.

Photograph courtesy of the Environmental Law & Policy Center



Albert Ettinger is a senior attorney for the Environmental Law & Policy Center.

The environmental agency should improve the wastewater permitting process to help ensure that it fully protects human health and wildlife. The agency needs to include limits on nutrients, particularly phosphorous, which cause problems in vast numbers of streams and lakes throughout the state. The agency already is moving on this problem through its prudent proposal to the Illinois Pollution Control Board to establish a one-part-per-million limit on most new or increased discharges of phosphorus. This proposal should be approved promptly.

The agency also needs to strengthen the permitting requirements for livestock operations, decentralized private sewage systems and mining operations.

Steps taken last year by the agency, the pollution board and citizen groups to improve the rules for granting discharge permits have improved opportunities for full and meaningful public participation. Now all essential permit terms are subject to public review and comment. With time, these changes should lead to better environmental protections for Illinois' waterways in answer to the public's demand for clean streams and lakes.

Meanwhile, Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan should aggressively pursue enforcement actions against polluters who violate their permits. She and the environmental agency should work with citizen groups that are willing to take on a share of the burden of enforcing the Clean Water Act.

Further, the agency and the Illinois Pollution Control Board should push to improve water quality standards. And the agency should propose refinements to the water use classification system, ensure that standards for toxic pollutants protect all sensitive species present in Illinois waters, establish nutrient standards that will protect aquatic life and drinking water quality, and restrict use of some Illinois waterways, designating them "mixing zones" for the dilution of pollutants.

Efforts at controlling rainfall-related pollution from stormwater run-off and combined sewer overflows must be also strengthened through increased funding and more thorough implementation of legal requirements for controlling this pollution.

Finally, Illinois should increase its efforts to control the types of pollution, referred to as "nonpoint pollution," that are largely outside the control of the Clean Water Act's regulatory scheme. This unregulated pollution, particularly pollution from agricultural operations that create run-off containing sediment, nutrients and pesticides, is clearly damaging more than 40 percent of Illinois waters. Given the extent of the problem, the state must seriously consider regulatory approaches for controlling this type of pollution.

The Clean Water Act has made a significant difference in the quality of Illinois' water. Taking action in the areas cited here will ensure the federal law's continued efficacy and will clean Illinois' water for generations to come. ❑

Albert Ettinger is a senior attorney specializing in water and enforcement issues for the Environmental Law & Policy Center. He is the author of a report the center produced last fall to assess the quality of Illinois' rivers, lakes and streams and its implementation of the Clean Water Act. That study was funded by the Lumpkin Family Foundation of Mattoon.

Q&A Question & Answer

Donald Wuebbles

A professor of atmospheric sciences and head of that department at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, he is a world-renowned expert on global warming. Wuebbles has emphasized the development and use of mathematical models of the atmosphere to study the chemical and physical processes that determine its structure. He developed the concept of Ozone Depletion Potentials that was used in the Montreal Protocol and the federal Clean Air Act. He is co-author of a similar concept, Global Warming Potentials.

Wuebbles wrote a 2003 assessment report for the Ecological Society of America on the potential impact of climate change in the Great Lakes region as a result of emissions from power plants and automobiles. It was published by the Union of Concerned Scientists, a non-profit environmental advocacy group.

He joined more than 60 scientists — including several Nobel laureates — in signing a Union of Concerned Scientists' statement, Restoring Scientific Integrity in Policy Making. *It charged President George W. Bush's administration "has often manipulated the process through which science enters into its decisions."*

Q. *What compelled you to sign the letter?*

I've been involved in many environmental issues over the years. I've seen what this administration has done in terms of manipulating science, and I didn't think that was appropriate. I received a copy from good friends who have won Nobel Prizes. They asked me if I'd like to sign it, and I said yes.

Q. *The movie* The Day After Tomorrow, *as well as a Pentagon report, describe extreme scenarios of global warming that lead to the shutdown of the ocean's thermohaline circulation. What is that and why is it important?*

First of all, don't take that Pentagon report too strongly. That was taking things to extreme — like this movie — a think-tank way of looking at questions rather than good science. Not that it was bad science, but it was way out.

But it is of interest to scientists that the thermohaline circulation [ocean currents driven by differences in the density of sea water, which is controlled by temperature and salinity] could be affected as a result of this warming. There is a possibility that it could lead to some areas having an overall cooling, but there's a lot of uncertainty about that.

So what is happening is that the earth is warming, and the data is getting clearer and clearer every day that it is strongly connected to human activities, the burning of fossil fuels resulting in increased carbon dioxide and some other important constituents, that are affecting our climate.

What's happening as a result of that is glaciers are melting. Places like Glacier National Park may not have glaciers in a few more decades because of what's going on. Sea levels will rise, partially because of ice melting, but also because water expands as it warms.

The kind of thing in *The Day After Tomorrow*, when the ice caps suddenly melt, and Greenland suddenly melts and Antarctica melts, just isn't going to happen in a few weeks. Not that those things couldn't happen, but they're unlikely to happen for many, many decades. In the case of Antarctica, over this century, it's been projected that it may actually increase slightly in ice content rather than decrease.

What happens when melting occurs and the glaciers decline is that you're putting more fresh water into the ocean. So you're setting up gradients between the salty parts of the ocean and the fresh water. That can result in some changes in the circulation. Now, it's generally thought that the changes in circulation that will occur are not likely to be, at least over this century, major enough to have any impact on the climate itself. It's never going to lead to snowstorms in the summer in New York as this movie portrays.

Q. *So farmers in Illinois don't have to worry that there's going to be more droughts or more rain?*

Over the next few years, it's hard to know. We know climate is changing. We don't know enough on a global scale to make useful predictions over a short period to say how much there'll be a change in floods or droughts.

However, the study, the Great Lakes assessment, did suggest — and I want to stress the answer is not final — that we can expect over the coming decades there would likely be an increase in the amount of droughts and floods, and for several reasons. The climate analyses did suggest that precipitation would increase in the winter in Illinois and decrease in the summer and fall. Because the atmosphere can hold more water as it warms — that's just a fact of physics — both of these [times of the year] are likely to get more severe storms. But that's in decades, not next year or in five years.

Q. *More people will undoubtedly see the movie than the Pentagon report. Do you think either will be persuasive enough to sway policy-makers?*

I can tell you that many people in Congress are worried about this issue. Sen. [John] McCain and Sen. [Joe] Lieberman have proposed a bill to try to instruct the U.S. to do something, even on a voluntary basis, to start reducing emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases that affect climate. So it's a bipartisan move, but unfortunately there is some hard-line thinking in the [Bush] Administration. They're not going to do anything to upset promotion of the oil industry.

Q. What part of the science behind those extreme scenarios would you have politicians believe?

The movie publicizes the issue, but it just takes things way too far. But there is real science hidden in there, and that's the problem. Carbon dioxide and other important climatological gases that can affect our climate are increasing in the atmosphere. There's no question about that. These are long-lived gases; they're well spread around the earth once we release them in the atmosphere.

The evidence is very strong — to the point where there's really no question amongst the scientists who really know what's going on — that those concentrations are due to human activities, primarily burning of fossil fuels. Carbon dioxide has increased by 30 percent over the last two centuries as a result of this.

[Computer] models indicate that over the century, as a result of what we're doing, even given all the uncertainties of what we might do in terms of projecting future fuel use, population increase, economic development, family life, we're still talking, globally, [a rise in temperature of] roughly 2 to 6 degrees Celsius, which translates to roughly 3 to 11 degrees Fahrenheit.

If we look to Illinois, as a result of those projections for the planet, we're talking of changes of 7 to 13 degrees [F] in winter and 9 to 17 degrees in summer by the end of the century. We're talking about substantial changes that basically assume we don't do anything in terms of making national and international policy to protect our climate.

Q. What is an example of what that much temperature change will do in the state and region?

By the end of the century, Illinois' climate will be more like that of eastern Texas. If you've ever been to Dallas in the summertime, it's humid like here, precipitation isn't much different from here, but we're talking temperatures that are darn uncomfortable. It's a different climate than we're used to.

If you look at the temperatures we've seen globally in the last two decades and then go back and look at the last 1,000 years of temperatures — what you see is these last two decades are warmer than any period in the last 1,000 years. And the changes we're seeing match up perfectly with the analyses that are being done that can only be explained by human activity and its impact.

Carbon dioxide is an important greenhouse gas, as is water vapor and ozone. So with carbon dioxide changing by over 30 percent, it should have an impact, and it is having an impact. Most of it is our burning of fossil fuels, burning coal and oil and gasoline.

Q. Why do you think the Bush Administration, more than others in our history, is resistant to the warnings of so many of our nation's best scientific minds?

Science speaks in terms of the right direction, and the government is just not listening to it and going off and doing what it damn well pleases and then tries to somehow justify that afterwards. They're just not listening to the science. ❑



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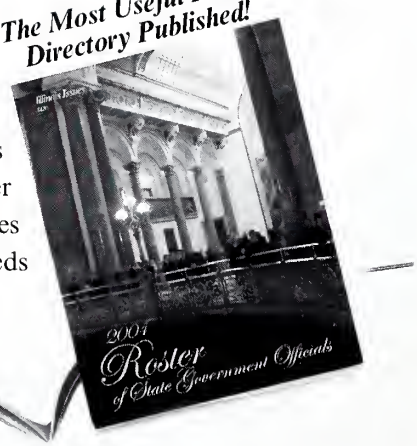
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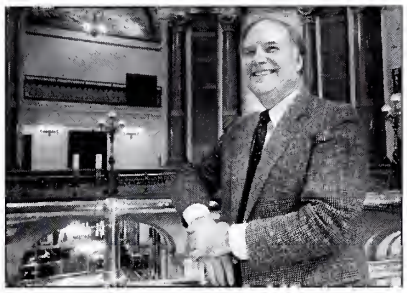
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Charles N Wheeler III



Incumbent Illinois lawmakers are hardly an endangered species

by Charles N. Wheeler III

Since the 1870s, the Democratic donkey and the Republican elephant have symbolized the nation's two major political parties, both the handiwork of *Harper's Weekly* cartoonist Thomas Nast.

As the spring legislative session dragged on past its scheduled adjournment with Gov. Rod Blagojevich and legislative leaders unable to craft a budget, however, some analysts wondered whether a more fitting image for lawmakers might not be a chicken.

No, not necessarily *that* kind of chicken, but rather *Tympanuchus cupido*, the greater prairie chicken, an endangered species in Illinois. Finding the right mix of spending cuts and revenue increases to balance the budget was difficult, according to the theory, because this is an election year.

So lawmakers feeling threatened by stiff competition in November understandably were reluctant to antagonize voters, whether by paring back Blagojevich's recommended spending increases for education and health care, or by embracing his proposed tax and fee hikes for business and consumers.

The sense of jeopardy was naturally greater in the House, with all 118 seats on the line, compared to just 23 of 59 in the Senate. (The other 36 senators won four-year terms in 2002.) So House Speaker Michael Madigan had to be more cautious than his fellow Chicago Democrat, Senate President Emil Jones Jr.

Finding the right mix of spending cuts and revenue increases to balance the budget was difficult, according to the theory, because this is an election year.

At first glance, a plausible hypothesis, right? But, upon further review, as they say in the NFL, most lawmakers are hardly in the same endangered category as the prairie chicken. In fact, the overwhelming majority are about as threatened as the red-winged blackbirds that abound across the state.

Consider the Senate. Only 11 of the 23 seats are being contested; in the other 12 districts, the winner is foreordained, as six Democrats and a like number of Republicans face no opposition. Moreover, in 10 of the 11 districts with 2004 races, the victorious party's plurality in 2002 was more than 55 percent, generally considered a landslide; indeed, five won with 100 percent of the vote. The lone exception was Rushville Democratic Sen. John Sullivan, who upset incumbent Republican Sen. Laura Kent Donahue of Quincy by 2,394 votes, a 52-48 margin, in the 47th District in western Illinois.

At first glance, the electoral apprehension might seem more justified in the House, where everyone serves two-year terms. But although all 118 seats are up in November, less than half of the positions are being contested by the two major parties. Republicans have no candidate in 33 districts, while Democrats are giving the GOP a pass in 28 districts. Voters will have at least a nominal choice between the two in 57 districts, 33 of them now held by Democrats and 24 by Republicans.

In reality, even that modest appearance of competition is misleading, for in just 10 of the contested districts was the winning candidate's 2002 plurality less than 60 percent, with the two parties splitting the "cliff-hangers." In fact, only two incumbents facing November challengers won by less than 1,000 votes in 2002. Democratic Rep. Kathleen Ryg of Vernon Hills posted a 107-vote margin, while Rep. Elizabeth Coulson, a Glenview Republican, was a 666-vote victor.

That would seem to suggest a pretty substantial one-party dominance in the 47 districts in which the loser pulled less than 40 percent. One possible note of encouragement for dark-horse challengers: The 2002 winner is not

seeking another term in 11 of the 47 lopsided districts, although appointed incumbents are running in nine of them.

Despite the general trend toward incumbent invulnerability, though, at least one Chicago lawmaker is a certain loser. The 20th District race on Chicago's North Side and northwest suburbs matches two current members, Reps. Michael McAuliffe and Ralph Capparelli. The head-to-head confrontation stems from the 2001 redistricting, under which McAuliffe, a Republican, found himself living in the same new district as Capparelli and fellow Democrat Rep. Robert Bugielski. McAuliffe defeated Bugielski two years ago, while Capparelli ran and won in a neighboring district. But the 17-term Democrat chose not to move into the new district, as was required for him to run there this time, opting instead to challenge McAuliffe, an eight-year veteran.

While the remap fallout will claim either McAuliffe or Capparelli in November, the 2001 redistricting plan is one of the main reasons so many incumbents are getting a free ride into another term. Whether Democrats or Republicans draw legislative boundaries, the intent is not to encourage competition. Legislative races that are truly toss-ups are costly to bankroll and carry a real possibility of losing. So the object is to create "safe" districts — ones in which partisan leanings can be reliably predicted — with as many as possible skewed to favor the party crafting the map.

Blaming the budget impasse on ballot-box butterflies seems quite a stretch for now.

Following the 2000 federal census, Democrats won the right to draw new districts reflecting demographic changes of the previous decade, and party cartographers produced a plan that in 2002 strengthened the party's House majority and restored its control of the Senate after a decade of minority status. While their handiwork might seem to contradict a civics-book notion of fair and open elections, it certainly was in keeping with past practice — Republicans did the same thing a decade earlier. In fact, the GOP cartographers were so successful that 55 of 59 Senate districts and 100 of 118 House districts didn't change their partisan stripes during five elections under the 1991 map.

So blaming the budget impasse on ballot-box butterflies seems quite a stretch for now. Still, the Democratic governor and his party leaders might well consider how voter dissatisfaction at their inept performance this spring might play out two years hence. ❑

Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

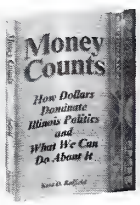
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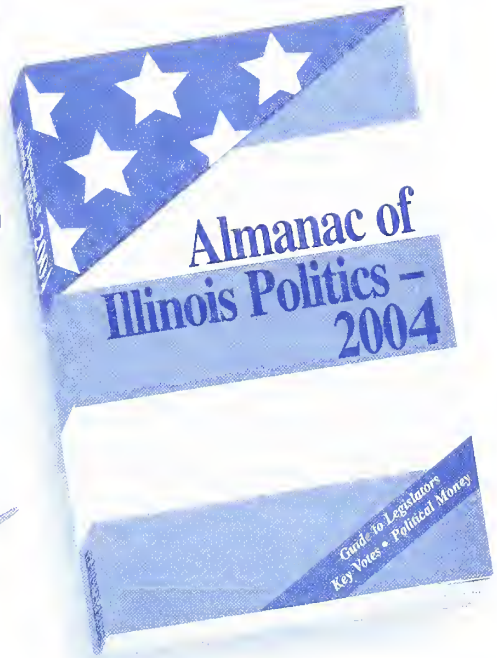
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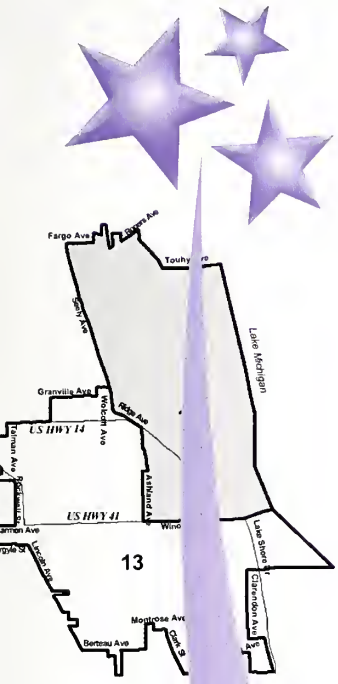
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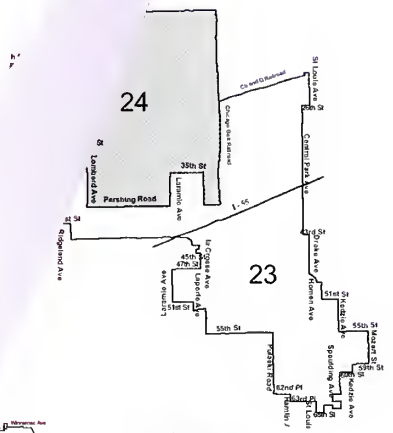
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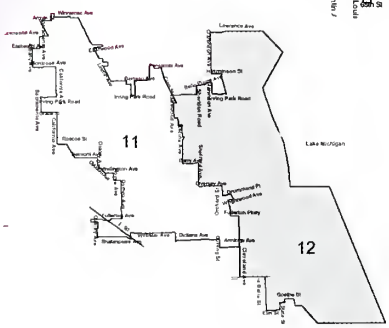
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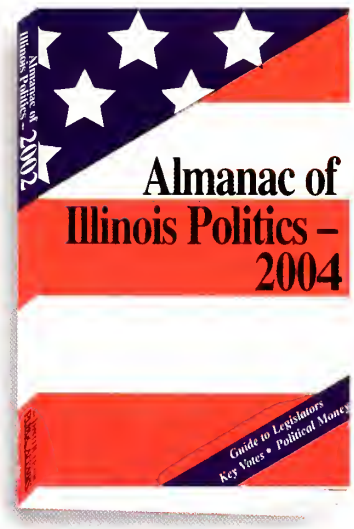
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